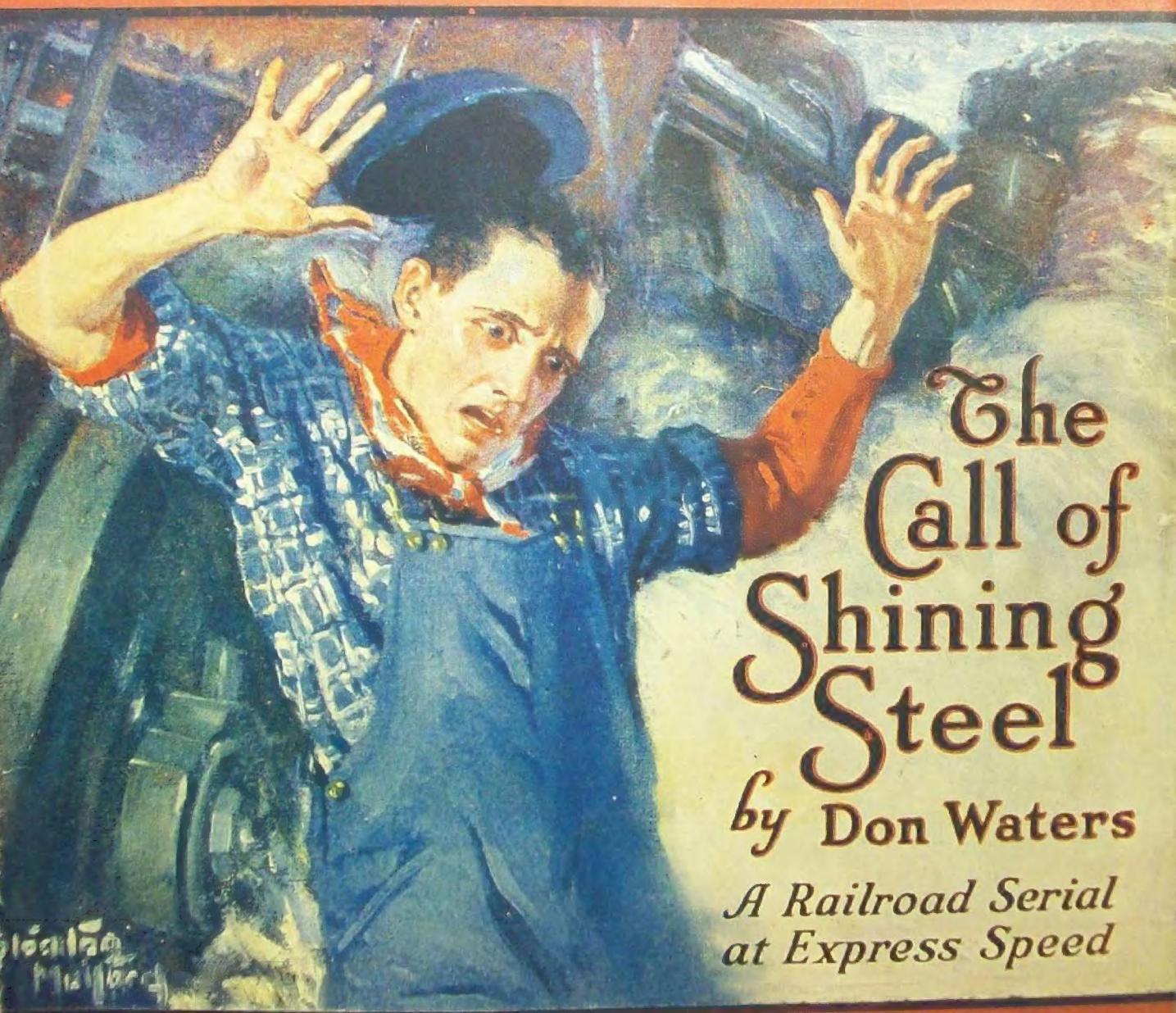


ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



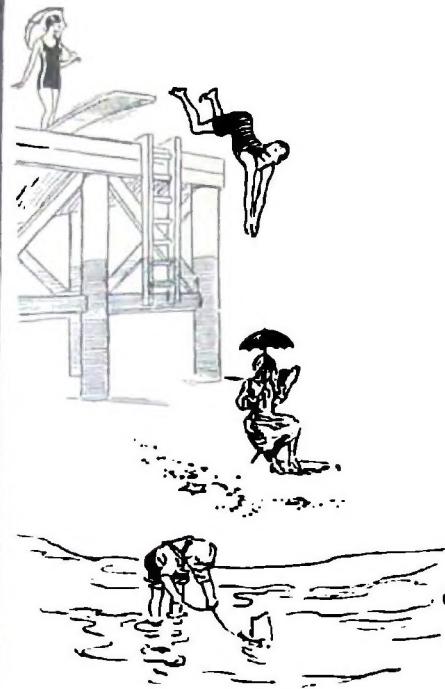
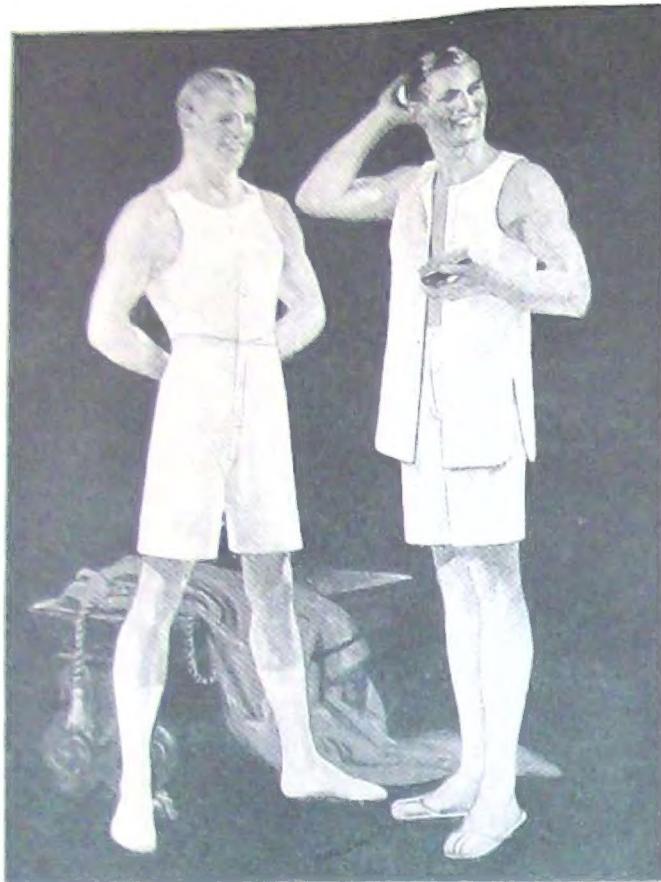
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JUNE 27

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"Looking for the label" after you're
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REMEMBER that no underwear without
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXIX

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OUR FOURTH OF JULY NUMBER

next week, will carry two Complete Novelettes, one a very unusual tale of the Canadian wilderness,

LURE OF THE WILD By Robert Pinkerton

Co-Author of "Herdsmen of the Air"

the other, "Captain," a dog story that cannot fail to charm, by Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift. There will also be another breath-holding experience of "Hopalong Cassidy's Pal," by Clarence E. Mulford, and a notable piece of work by Henry Holt, entitled "On Jeweled Altars."

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
HOPEFIELD HOUSE, HANWELL, W. 7, LONDON, ENGLAND

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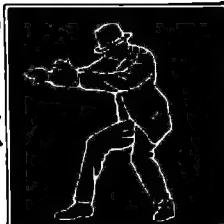
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(Ref. — Midland Bank, Cleveland.)

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is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needsful for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXIX

SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 1925

NUMBER 6



The Call of Shining Steel

By **DON WATERS**

CHAPTER I.

AN AMBITION.

FAR up on the steep hillside, three figures worked slowly across the center of the few stump ridden acres cleared out from the surrounding timber. Not a sound broke the quiet except the clicking of their hoes, chopping the joint grass and sorrel weed that covered the ground between the straggling stalks of corn.

The sun standing almost straight overhead, was so hot that even their big straw hats made but little shade. The perspiration streamed down the faces of the workers. They moved along the corn rows in a sidewise shuffle, occasionally lifting one foot or hopping up grotesquely as the rocks dislodged from above rolled down toward their bare feet. A cloud of gnats swarmed thick in a buzzing knot over their heads.

With one accord, they stopped where

the corn row ended in a patch of locust sprouts.

Zeb White straightened his back, wiped his forehead and exclaimed bitterly: "Tain't right, I say! Tain't right fer we'uns to be workin' and strivin', agommin' around, layin' by this yere corn while pap's a froggin' about down at the depot."

His two sisters stood with uplifted hoes, amazed at the effrontery of any one who dared to criticize their father.

"Here is you'uns," went on the boy, for he was scarce turned eighteen, big, raw-boned, the promise of a powerful man. "Here is you'uns, and me and maw, bad off. We ain't got no clothes much to speak of. We cain't go to the protracted meetin's nor to the preachin's, nor the frolics, caise we don't look like nothin' and folks snigger at us. I cain't go to the school fer no more larnin' caise pap, be 'lows as how I must holp him work his craps, and that he is a loaferin' about and none of us cain't get what we wants, caise o' him. Tain't right, I says."

"But, Zeb, we all cain't holp hit. Pap's allus been thataway. We'uns must jest gom along and sorter make out somehow."

"Cain't holp hit, cain't we? I'll make a dart that'll show you'uns! I'm goin' to from, that's what I'm a p'intin' to joust at. I'm a goin' to from this yere place. I'm goin' to the public works, to the railroad!"

Then to make more dramatic effects of his words, he pointed his finger down toward the little station of Ecclefechan whose red shining roof could just be perceived, a blur though a gap in the green foliage of the trees.

"Thar's whar I'll be goin'. Listen!" he announced. "Listen!"

A faint "Whooo-whooo" floated up to them.

"Thar's Sixteen a comin' now," and a shining glitter came into Zeb's eyes. "I'm a goin' to pull Sixteen myself some day! We'uns won't be pore no more. And youall ull heve all the fine clothes youall hankers for, and maw, too, and pap." He stopped. "He's jest a no account, triflin' loaferer and too sorry for we'uns to own. I ain't gonna heve no more dealin's with him."

Zeb gazed longing down to where the

railroad, a twin path of wheel polished steel, could be made out in a half dozen places as the tracks curved around the mountain sides, spanned the creek on spindling trestles, or where the mica in the broken rock of the cuts glinted in the sunshine.

"Thar," he said, "thar! That goes somewhares."

He turned his gaze along the crooked corn row and over the rock strewn, ragged field.

"This yere don't go nowhere," he complained. "Breakin' and plantin', hoein' and layin' by, toppin' and fodderin', gatherin' and huskin', shellin' and grindin'—that's all fer makin' corn meal. And what fer? We'uns git a smidgeon of hit, jest bare enough to make hoe cakes and corn bread, while pap, he takes all the rest down to Pink Case's still. Cuss Pegleg Case and his corn liquor that we'uns a holpin' to make! I'm a goin' down to the railroad whare folks do something better than work and live about like blind steers so some one else can get corned up, lit higher than the burnin' bush."

Picking up his heavy, hand-forged hoe, Zeb twirled it around his head and pitched it clattering far down hill. He watched it tumble into the sassafras scrub that fringed the field, then turned and strode up toward the cabin with its stick and mud chimney on one end, its tumbling lean-to on the other.

One shabby room with the big, black fireplace, two beds on one side, and a "pallet," a couch made of a few worn blankets in the corner, a half dozen fire blackened pots setting on the stone hearth before the smoldering fire. Not a picture on the bare log walls. Not a rug to cover the rough floor. This was Zeb's home.

He strode through the door or rather the opening, for door there was none. It had been blown off the spring before and Bill White had never put it back. Zeb went over to the dark corner where he stripped off his torn shirt and faded overalls and put on his "good clothes." His mother watched, fearful, apprehensive, at this stir. She had known for some time that Zeb was dissatisfied.

In a timid questioning voice she asked: "What ye aimin' to do, Zeb? Ye'd better go along with yer hoeing. Yer pap ull slabber ye around ef he comes back and ye heven't laid by that air corn."

"I'm a goin' away," Zeb answered defiantly. "I'm plumb through yere. I'm a goin' down to the public works to get a job o' work."

"Yere pap ull be fu' wrathsome when he comes back. Mind ye, Zeb, he has a heavy hand."

"So he has," the boy assented, "but he'd better not lay hit on me. Ef he tries to stop me, I'll—I'll sink a barb in him up to the feathers! I'll—I'll do fer him! I'm sore out o' heart wi' this yere place and his triflin' way o' doin'."

He finished dressing and stepped to the door where he half turned.

"Good-by, maw. Ye'll be a hearin' from me." As an afterthought he added: "Don't be a frettin' and a greetin'. I'm a goin' to do all right. I'll look out fer you'uns. I'll take keer of you'uns better than pap ever has."

His eyes wandered down to the railroad, to the village of Ecclefechan, to the glittering steel of the rail that stretched out, leading into the world, a world that Zeb but dimly knew of. Then he squared his shoulders and strode down the rutted, rock-cluttered road that wound down the hill.

Behind him, his two sisters stood watching him and talking together in low, hushed whispers. In a few minutes the clank, clank of their hoes was heard again. Men might do as they would in the mountains, but women must do as their men ordered.

His mother, a worn figure in a cheap cotton print dress, wisps of gray showing in her light yellow hair, with the seams of care graved deep over her thin cheeks, and moisture welling up in her faded blue eyes, watched till her black-haired son with long strides passed around a bend in the road and was hidden from sight by a clump of laurel bushes.

Slumping down into a split hickory bottom chair and holding her apron over her eyes, she moaned: "Oh, Zeb, ye're my first borned and ye've done left me!"

Tears that were hard to come, once start-

ted flowed freely and the woman wept, low, monotonously, without stopping.

The girls entered the cabin a half hour later, cast timid glances at the weeping figure, silently set the table with the chipped and cracked dishes and quickly slipped out of the house, for they feared there would be trouble when their father returned.

A clumping of heavy shoes thumped outside on the hard packed clay of the bare dooryard.

"Well, woman, let's have a snack," was the order that Bill greeted his wife with as he came in through the low doorway.

Sitting down to the table, he cleared his throat, looked around. "Whare's Zeb?" Then noticing the woman sniffing softly in the chimney corner he asked: "What ye greetin' fur, woman?"

"Zeb," she moaned. "He's done gone down to the railroad. He's left. He 'ows as how he won't come back yere no more."

"To the railroad? He's bin hankerin' fer the railroad fer some time," he answered, heaping a pile of food on to his plate. "Ye needn't worry. He ull be back when his guts gits a growlin'. He'll soon find out as how thare bain't nothin' in railroadin'. Pink Case, he air said more nor wanst that he wished to God he'd stayed up with his pap a makin' good corn lickker instead o' gettin' a lot o' lofty notions and goin' down on the public works.

"Yep," Bill remarked between mouthfuls, "Pink 'ud heve had two laigs now 'stead o' one ef he'd 'a' knowed what lay awaitin' fer him down thare on the railroad. Heap o' work and little fur hit. Ef Zeb's so bilin' fur to work, thare's a God's plenty fur him right yere."

Then he added with a snarl: "And the corn not yet laid by! When he comes a draggin' back yere, I'll larrup the fiesty tyke to a queen's taste!"

At this the woman sprung up. "Ye needn't be a makin' yere threats at the boy, Bill, caise he's gone beyont ye fer always. Zeb was a good boy and ye should be proud o' him 'stead o' growlin'!"

Then crying softly: "Ah, Zebbe, ye'll never come home! Ye'll never come home, I know!" She busied herself getting the

food off the fire while Bill White, with many cluckings and suckings, ate wolflike and ravenous.

"I'll see about him arter I eats," he announced. "I'll see about him a fu' plenty."

But dinner over and the three women taking their places at the table to make their meal from the leavings, Bill decided that he would wait till the cool of the evening before going down into the valley to bring his son home. Instead he went up the trail over the ridge above to where Pink Case was souring a couple of barrels of mash at the still, cunningly hidden under the overhanging bank of the creek beneath the thicket of heavy twisted rhododendron scrub.

Bill White lacked the imagination of his son and he little knew the urge of ambition that fired Zeb as he approached the station at Ecclefechan, bound outward on his grand adventure.

CHAPTER II.

ZEB MAKES HIS LUCK.

SIXTEEN, the noon passenger train, when five miles out of Ecclefechan, passed the way freight on the siding. A salute from her whistle, a wave from gloved hands as the engineers greeted each other, and the passenger rattled along.

John Deering, the engineer of the Local, looked back, caught the highball from Willie Mac, his conductor, and the 128 puffed and wheezed, steam blowing out from her rod packing, with a rumble from her stack that told of worn cylinders, uneven valve faces and blowing piston rings, haltingly getting into motion. The local engine was in bad shape indeed. But anything was good enough for the Local. Her train was not heavy, she was on no regular schedule, and in consequence the 128 was a picture of neglect, only being repaired enough to pass the government inspectors.

Groaning and complaining to the accompaniment of the slam-slam of her brasses, clanging loudly at each stroke of her rods, she negotiated the five miles from the Y where she turned every day and met Sixteen, to the open front shed that served as a

freight station at Ecclefechan. A rattling, decrepit pile of moving scrap, the 128 pulled her string of cars along slowly while Willie Mac waved his hand up and down, up and down, "spotting" an open car before the freight shed.

The Local was a joke on the railroad, and well she might be. But eighty miles was her run and yet it was a touch and go every trip to make it inside the government law that expressly designates sixteen hours as a trainman's day. Sixteen hours and eighty miles—five miles an hour. A man might almost walk that fast and still time after time, day after day, the Local was caught by the law, forced into a siding while another engine and crew came out and hauled her into the terminal.

Decrepit and ancient as was the 128, she could have made quicker time. It was not because the engine was slow that the Local lost time. When in motion she could clip off a good rate. It was the stopping and starting, the loading and unloading that ate up the hours. The freight on the Local must be tallied piece by piece, station by station, so her progress was a series of ten-minute runs and half hour stevedoring.

Four brakemen made up the crew, four men who moved a couple of hundred tons of mixed goods in a day. The Local is your true argosy of commerce. Two hundred-pound sacks of fertilizer, clumsy sacks of cotton seed hulls, iron drums of oil, boxes and bales, a gear wheel for a grist mill, a bundle of goods for a country store, a couple of thousand feet of dressed lumber, even at times, a cheap automobile crated, its wheels inside the body, its top laid flat, its mechanism bare like a black beetle the ants have dismantled.

Small wonder that the crew of the way freight welcomed any one who would help them. A man who tried to beat his way on a passenger is unceremoniously dumped off as soon as he is discovered. On a fast freight often as not, he generally "hits the gravel" when a brakeman finds him aboard. But the uninvited passenger on the Local is immediately impressed into the service and to work his way becomes more than a phrase. It soon is a straining, twisting, pushing, tugging reality.

The Local stopped at Ecclefechan and as Willie Mac tugged at the barrel skids placing them before a car door, a voice hailed him.

"Maynin', cap! I reckon youall won't keer ef I holps ye a bit."

Glancing up, Willie saw a black-haired mountain boy, tall and spare, surveying him inquiringly with a pair of snappy dark eyes.

"Help me? Sure, grab a holt, son," and together they hooked the skids over the door sill.

For half an hour, Zeb worked manfully along with the rest of the crew, unloading drums of oil and heavy sacks of ground phosphate rock fertilizer that smelled abominably. The freight for Ecclefechan was soon out, then a half car of tan bark and a dozen crates of chickens were loaded and checked. The conductor went into the station and in a few minutes came out with a flimsy in his hand, the train orders.

As he walked up toward the engine, Zeb followed.

"Cap, I'm a fixin' to go into town. How is it to sorter go along?"

"All right, son. Sure thing. You can come back into the shanty with me," pointing back to where the converted box car that served as a caboose terminated the train.

"But, cap," Zeb persisted, "I'm a thankin' youall fer that, but cain't ye fix hit so as I ride in the engine?"

The conductor halted, looked at the earnest young mountaineer for a moment.

Then with a laugh: "If you will promise to come back and work at each stop, I'll see Johnny and fix it up for you."

A few words when the train orders passed hands and Zeb's heart leaped at the laughing command from the engineer: "Climb up, bud, and see how you like it."

A short blast from the whistle, a few gong-gongs of her bell, and the 128, creaking and groaning, set out on her journey to the next station below. Zeb sat fascinated on the fireman's seat box, watching John Deering when he opened the throttle wide and, feet braced against the boiler head, eased the reverse lever up toward the center of the quadrant. The fireman swung

his shovel into the coal, jerked the chain on the fire door latch and in one movement the door opened, his body swung, the scoop clanged against the opening, the handle went down and the coal sprayed over the glowing fire.

He kicked the door closed and taking his seat behind Zeb, he muttered: "I'm going to lay off this run as soon as I get a good stake. It beats me. Rotten grates, nozzle too big, draft sheet not set right, leaky flues. Oh, hell! Everything's wrong with this scrap heap! I gotta kink in my back like a measuring worm, trying to cram enough coal into her craw to keep her rolling."

Zeb nodded appreciatively, although the words "grates and nozzles," "flues and sheets," meant absolutely nothing to him. He pondered, listening to the other growling at his job. God, he didn't know how well off he was! He wondered if the fireman in the blue overalls with the red handkerchief knotted around his neck and the thick leather gloves on his hands, with his well-shod feet and the heavy gold watch peeping out of his overall pocket—he wondered if he had ever hoed corn on a rocky field, barefooted, with the gnats hovering in a thick cloud, biting sharp at the line on his head where the hair starts and the sun, hot, smarting and burning on the back of his neck. Had he ever been compelled to eat corn bread and fatback three times a day and sleep on a bumpy corn shuck mattress at night? Did he know what it meant to work like a beaver so that a good for nothing father could keep in liquor, to wear rough brogans and shabby clothes?

He decided—no, the fireman never had known those things. To fire an engine, to sling shovel after shovel full of those gleaming hunks of coal on to the red, glowing fire bed, to hear them pop and sizzle, to lean an elbow gracefully on the padded window sill, to watch the smoke roll out of the stack, to look ahead at the rails or down at the rolling drivers, to wave a hand at boys tending the fields and know how much they envied you—that was life.

And his mind leaped at the thought, perhaps some time, somehow, by chance, maybe, there was the right hand side of the

cab, the drooping whistle-cord in its swaying arc over the head of the engineer, there were shining brass gadgets and a rattling thing that stood upright with a grip on its end, the "Johnson bar," some day, after a long time, perhaps, there were all these things for him.

Dreamily he closed his eyes, and the hot, greasy smell of the engine stung his nostrils, the *clack-clack*, *clack-clack* of the rods mingled with the roar of the exhaust in his ears, his hands resting on the window sill beside him telegraphed the jolts and vibrations of the movement of the engine over the road bed. The power and life of the locomotive throbbed through his brain and Zeb knew before he opened his eyes a minute later, that he would never be satisfied unless he, too, was a part of the railroad.

He looked through the narrow pane of glass in the cab front ahead to where the tracks wound around the hill. "Dead Man's Curve," a bad piece of track. There had been more than one wreck on it. The engine, with many a despairing squeal from complaining flanges, rounded the curve. Big Hungry Dip lay right beyond, a straight, steep run down to where the low trestle spanned Big Hungry Creek then up the sharp grade on the other side to the station. The engineer opened his throttle wide, dropped his reverse lever down a couple of notches and the 128 barked a louder note and gathered speed for the run down the short hill to gain the momentum necessary to carry her over the other side.

Zeb sat thrilled by the noise of the machinery and the blur of the woods that flashed by like a magic carpet of browns and greens close beside him. Running fast, the engine whipped the train behind it around the curve and down the hill. The fireman clanged the fire door open and shut; the shovel rattled against the coal in the tender, swung in a swift swoop and the coal slid into the firebox—legerdemain to Zeb's eyes.

The fireman stood, legs outstretched, one on the deck of the cab, one on the steel apron that covered the break between engine and tender on a jolting platform that moved sideways, up and down and back

and forth as it followed the movements of the swaying, jerking locomotive. The hollow, muffled sound of the trestle rumbled up from the wheels below, the bottom of the Dip was beneath. The engine seemed to Zeb to gather herself for the effort to climb the incline in front.

A jerk as the 128 took up the slack in the drawbars behind was followed by a sudden crash like lightning striking a nearby tree and Zeb turned quickly. To his amazed eyes, there was a gap between the engine and tender, a gap that widened, showing the rails beneath, the cross ties below them and the rock ballast of the road bed. Two heavy chains red with rust stretched out, then with grinding, grating pops, parted. The steel apron tilted downward, the air hose disconnected with a *wosh*, raising a cloud of dust. The fireman grabbed for the cab corner, yelled an ear splitting, frantic shriek and toppled backward toward the gap that was fast closing again as the brakes took hold and the sliding drivers of the engine checked its speed while the weight and momentum of the train behind on the hill forced the tender forward.

Paralyzed for a fraction of a second, Zeb sat petrified, so sudden and unexpected had the break occurred. Then even as the fireman's body tumbled down into the closing space between the chafing irons that in another second would close together, close-fitting like the jaws of a vise with a thousand tons pressure, Zeb moved. A quick step and he jumped on to the apron, one arm around the corner post of the cab. His right hand swooped down, closed over the fireman's jumper collar, his body curved and as he had often slung a sack of meal over his shoulder, one handed, he heaved the fireman clear.

There was a metallic clang when the tender struck chafing iron to iron, the rattle and patter of tumbling coal. A thick cloud of dust flew up and settled. Zeb looked back over the train. An involuntary cry arose from his throat. The Local was wrecking herself. Car after car would hesitate, buckle in the center, jump and crash over the car ahead. Like sheep jumping a fence, the box cars stopped almost

still, then urged on by the slant of the hill and their suddenly checked speed, with the crash of breaking wood and the sharp rip and clang of ruptured steel, they toppled over and collapsed. The noise died down. The dust settled and a jumbled, splintered litter of wood and twisted metal blocked the right of way.

In the all absorbing sight of the wreck, Zeb for a moment forgot the fireman. A shout attracted his attention and he turned his head in time to see him scrambling out of the thicket of blackberry briars that fringed the roadbed where Zeb had pitched him. Slightly bruised and bearing a few red scratches across his face where the thorns had raked him, the fireman limped up to the engine.

Looking up at Zeb he spoke: "Fellow, I sure do owe you a heap. And as sure as my name is Jim Brown, I won't forget you for many a day. Come on down here. I want to speak to you."

Zeb wondering and trembling a little, jumped down, stood hesitant before the fireman who was fumbling at a braided leather thong that led from a button in his jumper to the watch pocket. Zeb watched. He really hadn't any idea of what had happened, so quick, so stupendous was the smashup. As for the hand he had lent the fireman, "shucks, t'warn't nothin'," he heard his voice mumble.

Jim Brown unsnapped the leather thong with trembling fingers and drew a gleaming gold watch from out his breast pocket.

"Here, take this, old head!" Zeb heard the words and before he could manage his fluttering tongue, the fireman had shoved the watch into his hand and climbed up into the cab.

Surprise written on his face, Zeb could not frame the words of thanks he wanted to speak. A watch, a railroad watch! No one else in his family had ever owned a watch or needed one. The sun at noon was close enough for them. They ate when they got up in the morning, had dinner when the sun rode above Big Hungry Mountain and their evening meal when the shadows began to lengthen. And he, not yet two hours out from home, owned a watch. The thrill of possession gripped him. He gazed

at the little intricate piece of mechanism in its gold shell that lay in his hand and through his mind a wordless thought ran again and again. That watch was the promise of many other things his people had never experienced. He forgot all about the wreck, so full of pleasure had the gift filled him.

He looked back to see the conductor and brakeman hurrying forward, climbing over the wreckage.

Without a glance at him, they called to the engineer. "Oh, Johnny, are you hurt? Any one hurt?"

Zeb heard a reply. "No, we're O. K."

A murmur of voices followed, through which he caught the words, "Draw bar broke, safety chains parted. Jim putting in a fire. If it hadn't been for that boy, he'd 'a' gone to hell sure. Quickest thing I ever saw. Slung Jim clear just as he was about to be pinched."

He felt their eyes on him. Some one asked: "Bud, what's your name?"

"Zeb White," he answered. Pointing up the creek, "I come from up thar and I'm a fixin' to go to town to see about a goin' a railroadin' like you'uns." He stopped. He hadn't meant to say that.

A flush swept over his face. He watched the group around him covertly, expecting every second to hear some one break out into a laugh at his effrontery. Here they were, men of experience, railroaders, with their clean overalls over good suits of clothes, with their gold watches and money in their pockets, while he was nothing but a poor mountain boy without a penny in his homespun jeans and, he remembered shamefully, that he didn't even have socks on to cushion the insides of his rough brogans. But no laugh followed. A serious half circle of faces surrounded him.

The fireman broke the strained silence. Patting him on the shoulder: "Well, Zeb, old horse, if you want a job, I'll see to it myself and put in the right word for you."

"Me, too," spoke up the engineer. "You're the very stuff."

Came the unanimous chorus: "We'll all see that you get fixed right. We're for you, kid!"

"Well, boys, let's get moving," the con-

ductor was the first to come back to his job, for the responsibility of the train rested heavily on him. He sent a brakeman back to flag and one ahead to the station less than a mile away to report the wreck and call the "big hook."

Hours passed, hours intensely interesting to Zeb who remained with the wreck till the last car was lifted and dumped off the right of way. Finally the track was cleared and he joined the others in the shanty car when the wrecking crew pulled back toward the terminal, towing the crippled 128 and her tender behind them.

It was well past midnight when the yards were reached and in the meantime, Zeb had told the fireman his story briefly—of the struggle of his family to get the bare necessities of life, of most of the corn they raised finding its way to the still, of his "trifling, no account pap," and his work-worn mother, a pitiful tale that could be duplicated in a thousand cases with the mountain folk, isolated from civilization for generations and civilization, full born, being thrust upon them.

"Come on over and stay with me to-night," the fireman suggested when at last the wrecker stopped at her place beside the "rip track."

Zeb readily assented since he saw nothing strange in the invitation. "Come and spend the night with me," was a common phrase to him. Mountain hospitality goes far back before the days of modern hotels when the traveler in the sparsely settled hill country was a welcomed bringer of news and gossip.

Zeb was embarrassed and nervous when they entered the railroad boarding house and went up to Jim's room. But the fireman was so genuinely thankful that Zeb's mind soon became at ease. He was tired, the excitement of the day had died down and the other noticed his sleep heavy eyes. He was glad to hear the words, "Well, let's hit the hay!" Once in bed, a few mumbled words and he was asleep.

It seemed but an hour till he awakened. It was morning, for the sun was bright outside. Jim was dressing and Zeb got up, started to pull on his clothes.

His new found friend looked at him for

a second, then broke out: "Say, kid, I got a suit here, just fit you. Try it on."

He dived down into a drawer, pulled out a shirt, socks, underclothes, and unheeding Zeb's protests, said: "All right, kid. I aimed to give 'em to the Salvation Army soon anyway. Use these till your trunk gets here."

"But I hain't got no trunk. These yere is the best clothes I hev."

"Oh, hell! Don't tell all you know, kid! Wear those. Put 'em on, put 'em on! Get a curve on you and let's go down and feed. That's my second best suit. Keep it till you get a pay day."

Zeb glanced at himself in the dresser mirror and was startled at the change the clothes made in his appearance.

Together they went down stairs and Zeb listened as the fireman rang the call office.

"Nick, this is Jim Brown. No, I'm not hurt. Just scratched up a bit. Yeh, he sure did. I'll say it was lucky for me! Say, Nick, mark me off for a day or two. I'm sick of that 'jerk-along run.'"

Then as he hung up the receiver, he turned to Zeb. "Let's eat. We'll go down to Ring's and throw in a feed, some real coffee and ham and eggs. What say?"

CHAPTER III.

"RAILROADIN'"

TOGETHER Zeb and Jim went up Depot Street toward Ring's Café with its tattered cloth sign over the door, "The Railroad Men's Headquarters."

As they passed in front of the depot where stood a group of men, a half dozen dressed in overalls, carrying lanterns in their hands, one called out: "Oh, Jim! Come over here and let's have a look at the guy who heaved you clear!"

Zeb was terribly embarrassed when Jim introduced him around. Soon, however, his self consciousness left him and in a short time he was telling them about the Local's smashup.

When he had finished, a chorus of "Atta boy!" "You're all right, kid!" and "Come out with me when you learn the road!" greeted him.

One pulled out a watch. "Great balls of fire!" he exclaimed. "Here it is ten sixteen and I'm called for 83! Gotta get a curve on! So long," and he crossed the street toward the depot.

His leaving was the signal for the gathering to break up. The others with many a "Good' luck!" and "Kid, I'm for you!" separated, and the two continued on their interrupted way.

A warm glow of pride pervaded Zeb at the enthusiastic greetings. These men were good fellows, was his thought as he walked toward the restaurant.

Ring's was crowded. The half dozen tables ranged along one side were fringed with men. Each stool had an occupant before the counter, perched precariously on it. They reminded Zeb of a line of birds hunched on a rail fence. There was a clatter of dishes and a hum of voices from the rear. Through a semicircular hole in the kitchen door, the smell of grease welled out. The smoke from a score of pipes and cigarettes hung in heavy layers.

Two stools emptied and Zeb and Jim slid into the vacant places. Ring himself was scurrying behind the counter, carrying dirty dishes back and moving swiftly forward, his forearm piled high with stacks of filled orders. He stood before the two, wiping off the white counter top with a rather soiled looking towel.

"Howdy, Jim. Heard you like to got pinched yesterday,"

"Sure did," was the reply. "Would be eatin' daisies by the roots if it hadn't been fer my friend here. Meet Mr. White. Mr. White, Mr. Ring!"

Ring wiped a greasy hand on a soiled apron and shook Zeb's warmly.

"Glad to meet ya." Then, "What'll you have?"

Jim ordered: "Oh, a couple orders of ham an'," and turning to Zeb, "Suit you?"

Zeb nodded.

Ring dropped Zeb's hand, yelled back: "A usual—make it two!"

"An' a couple of Javas," Jim supplemented, and the orders, already cooked and waiting, were soon slid in front of them.

As they ate, Jim was talking between mouthfuls.

"Ring's gotta fine business here. Makes a bunch of kale, used to flag regular on the 'Midnight Express.' Forgot to close a switch at the side track at Melbourne one night. Jack Keefe on 72 split it, turned plumb over; killed Jack and the shine who was his fireboy. Ring got canned, ain't never got back, never will. Don't need to worry though. Busy now, pay day yesterday. Everybody's got the change now. Gets pretty slack in a couple of weeks before pay day comes around again. I gotta ticket here. Settle every pay day, so my credit's good. Oh, Ring," he called the proprietor. "I'm standin' fer this fellow. Give him what he wants. I'll make it good, all right."

"Righto," was Ring's rejoinder as he hurried past.

Jim continued his talk while through it, like an undertone, Zeb caught snatches of other talk that listed and rose above the general din.

"Fifteen hundred ton and just as we tops the hill she got the big hole, pulled out two draw bars about ten cars back." The man beside him was talking.

"We was a wheelin' 'em like hell, and I looks back and there they was, a rattlin' the cross ties," came from the table to his rear.

"I says to him: 'Whattenhell do you think I am? I want my rest!' Kin you imagine the crust of that call boy, arousin' me out at two in the morning and me just hit the hay at one fifteen?" was the indignant question from a fellow who stood up at the glass-topped show case rolling a cigarette.

A voice beside him, and Zeb turned to see a big, heavy-set man, smoke-stained, in his work clothes, talking to another at a table behind. "Yep," he was saying, "two hours and seven minutes late, and I made it up. Came in with a dozen hot boxes. I sure wheeled old 936 this morning. Made the guys in the observation coach think I was playing crack the whip with 'em round the curves!"

Railroading! The men's conversation was of nothing but the railroad. It was their life. As the road took their time all but their eight hours' "rest," so it took

their thoughts. It was indeed a fascinating business, this running trains.

Jim whispered: "That's Pat Doyle. He's got thirty years age. Stands fer any run he wants. He's a highball artist," he added in a tone of veneration.

They finished eating. Jim called out: "Chalk it down!" and they went out.

Diagonally across from Ring's was the station, the waiting room below and the offices above. Jim led the way upstairs to a door marked "Trainmaster." They entered a small room with a bench along the wall, three chairs and a flat-topped table under a green shaded electric lamp. Across the table sat Charley Keen, the trainmaster, vibrating his bug as he rattled off a message on the key.

He stopped, closed the switch, pulled his cigar out of his mouth.

"Hello, Jim. Glad to see you. Close squeak you had yesterday."

"Yes," replied Jim. "And if it hadn't been for my friend here, it would have been a damsite closer. Mr. White, meet Mr. Keen. Mr. Keen, Mr. White."

Zeb shook the proffered hand.

"Pleased to meet you, White," said the trainmaster looking at Jim inquiringly.

Jim continued. "He wants to get on the list a firin' and I'm standing for him. How about it?"

The trainmaster thought for a minute, surveying Zeb with a shrewd scrutiny, noting his straightforward eyes, his wide shoulders and his deep chest. Zeb's heart missed a beat or two as he hung breathless, waiting for the verdict.

"Sure, Jim. He's a husky looking bird. Ought to make as good a coal waster as you are. Here," the trainmaster handed over an application blank. "Get the doctor's O. K. and he can start to learn the road any time he gets ready."

The sounder on the table clicked insistently. The trainmaster with a word, "Busy," dismissed the two and, sitting down, began to pound out a message.

Zeb followed Jim downstairs, a flush of excitement on his face. He was really getting the job he had dreamed of so often.

They caught a waiting street car and twenty minutes later were in the office of

the company doctor. There he was put through the examination that each man must pass who works on the trains. A band around his bare arm and he watched the little hand vibrate on the dial while the doctor took his blood pressure. His heart action was listened to through the stethoscope, his lungs were examined.

A dozen questions—"Have you ever had this?" "Have you ever had that?" and the doctor jotted down the answers.

A big bundle of colored yarns, each strand by a shade differing from every other one, was brought out. Zeb's eyes, never strained by reading, never injured by the glare from an electric light, were as sharp as an eagle's.

"Pick out indigo," Doctor Miller ordered.

Zeb hesitated. "Doctor, I cain't tell jest what youall mean."

"Pick out the color of the sky," the doctor corrected himself.

Zeb considered, shook his head doubtfully. "The sky is a heap o' colors, doctor. Thar's the sky in the mawnin'. That's light blue with reds and yellers and pinks in hit. Thar's the sky in the evenin' with blood color streaks and smears like pokerry stain and red like a red bird and ivy when the frost gits hit. Thar's the sky at night with the color of a scrooch owl's feathers, gray and ashy. Thar's all the colors ye heve in this hank o' yarn and a heap more."

The doctor laughed. "Boy, you're right. You're neither color ignorant nor color blind. I guess you know as much about color as you'll ever need to know to railroad."

He led the way to the board where the little red and green and blue lights glowed in a darkened room. They went out. One flashed back on.

"Name that!" came the order.

"Red."

Another. "Blue."

Smaller and smaller the lights became. At each flash one after another, they blinked for a second and went out. Down to mere colored pin points, Zeb called each one. Both eyes open, one shut, then the other closed while the lights shone through

the smallest aperture, Zeb called each one true.

The doctor finished. "Boy, you have the sharpest pair of eyes that I've tested in many a day." He paused. "And the finest body."

The old doctor laid his hand on Zeb's shoulder. "Son, let me give you a word of advice. I've seen a lot of men come here. You've got a body to be proud of. Don't abuse it. Keep away from the drink—and the women—and you'll work your way up to the finest position on the railroad. You're O. K. as far as being physically fit to go to work. I hope you'll be as good a man next time I examine you. Good morning."

While Jim chattered along at a great rate on the way back down toward the depot, Zeb had little to say. The old doctor with his kindly face and fatherly manner, had made a big impression on him and over and over in his mind he repeated the words—"Keep away from the drink—and the women!"

The car stopped before the depot. They walked over to "Hands & Company," the commissary. Here Zeb got a suit of overalls, shoes, leather gloves and the other clothing that Jim suggested. The clerk jotted the items down, gave him a copy of the bill and Zeb, rather astonished at the fact that a stranger would trust him with all those goods and receive nothing in return, looked at Jim for enlightenment.

"How comes they never asked me for no money nor anything?"

"Oh," explained Jim, "I stood for you. You see, it's like this. Hands & Company furnish any one on the pay roll with anything they want. Then they turn the bill into the timekeeper and it comes out of your check. They settle with the company and the railroad rakes out about ten per cent for their trouble. It's a graft, but," Jim shrugged his shoulders philosophically, "if they don't get your money, some one else will."

"But," Zeb persisted, "suppose I ain't got no check a comin'?"

"Don't worry, kid. They won't lose anything. They'll take your bill out of mine as I stood for you. I'm standing for you

all the way. And, Zeb, I want you to just use my room as long as you have a mind to, and my clothes or anything. Just consider them yourn till you get a pay day. Let's see. This is the first day after pay day. You've got a long wait. You won't draw a cent till the twentieth of next month. Then you'll get paid for what you made this month. You'll need a few bones to sorter keep a going."

Jim reached into his pocket, pulled out a ten-dollar bill and shoved it into Zeb's hand. To his protests he only laughed. "No, that's all right. Let me know if you want any more. Pay me back if you ever feel like it and if you don't, we're square. I owe you a lot more."

Zeb glanced at the bill. "Jim," he said, "ye sure are clever to me. Here I am, a wearin' your best clothes and a watch ye heve give me and now this yere money. I feel like as though I was a runnin' over you. I ain't never felt so before to nary person and, Jim, mebbe ye had better take yer watch back. I know it costs a heap of money, a watch like this yere un."

"I never knew it when I got that watch," was the rejoinder. "All you have to do when you want a watch is to go get an order from the timekeeper and go up-town to the official jeweler and he gives you any watch you want. Of course, he charges a little extra, but it comes out of your checks in four or five payments. Besides, Zeb, you need a clock and you sure have earned all I can do fer you. That's why I'm fixing everything up for you."

Zeb began to realize the meaning of pay day, a general settling up of debts contracted during the month, a small bit left to spend for a few days, then broke and running on credit. Most of the railroad men counted the days till the next time "the eagle screamed."

Extravagance, silk shirts, patent leather shoes, fine clothes, expensive cigars, were in evidence wherever the two went, from group to group, from the depot to the poolroom, from Ring's back to the hotel. Zeb whose whole life had been a struggle to gain enough to eat, thought ruefully when he refused a cigar or the surreptitious bottle of corn whisky in the rear of the fruit

store, of how many dollars were being flung recklessly away down here where the smoke of the roundhouse hung heavy and acrid and the noise of the shunted cars, banging coupler to coupler, sounded loud. He wondered if these men had ever known the sharp pinch of hunger, of the cutting winds of December turning their bodies blue with cold.

No, he decided, they were ignorant of the want he had known so intimately. He made up his mind that once pay days and fat checks came to him, he would save every penny he could. For a picture rose vivid in his mind, a picture of a log cabin, a smoky open fireplace and his mother and sisters in their drab working clothes and their drabber, monotonous working lives. He'd bring them to town, he'd dress them up. They'd be ladies and—

They were walking across the street, when on the sidewalk before them a woman hesitated, turned toward Jim and smiling stopped.

Jim whispered: "There's Sidewheeler. I'll give you a knockdown."

Zeb studied the woman. Young she was, not over twenty, full bosomed, broad hipped, a strong, healthy looking girl just turned woman. She reminded him of a ripe winesap apple, the red of her lips, the glow in her cheeks, the perky, saucy way she surveyed the two with snapping black eyes as they drew nearer. No, not an apple. Zeb changed his simile. A gray squirrel in the autumn with coat full and sleek, eyes sparkling, every movement a thing of swift action.

When they drew nearer, Jim greeted her with a curt "Hello!"

"Heyho yourself," came the offhand answer.

"Meet my friend," Jim presented Zeb who took the outstretched hand where a couple of rings sparkled in the sunshine.

"Heyho, kiddo." Evidently Sidewheeler with her quick wit saw Zeb was not interested in her, for after a rapid survey she said: "Oh, Jim, come here a minute. I want to talk private to you."

They stepped off across the sidewalk and Zeb watched them conversing in low tones. Finally the woman's voice rose louder so

that Zeb caught the words. "Yes, I want a five spot. No, two won't do."

He saw the flash when a bill changed hands and with a "by-bye, kiddo!" thrown over her shoulder to Zeb, she was gone.

Zeb gazed after her as she went up the street and scarcely heard Jim's words.

"Yep, Sidewheeler's an awful gold digger. She hit me for a five spot just now, but she's not so bad. I'll touch her for it back in a week or two. How do you like her looks? She's some jane, old head. Some jane, all right," repeated Jim with zest.

Zeb did not answer, for he had seen that the color in her face was the color of rouge and the carmine of her lips was too bright to be natural. And the quick vivacity that had struck him so favorably, that, too, was forced. Zeb had caught the odor of raw corn whisky when she spoke the few words to him. He dismissed her from his thoughts. The words of the old doctor returned to him—"Keep away from the drink and women, son." Sidewheeler was one of the women the doctor meant. There was no mistaking her.

They went back to the hotel where a crowd of men lounged in their chairs tipped back against the wall of the big front room. A hum of voices buzzed loud and the thick cloud of smoke that hung overhead denoted to Zeb that here was another bunch of railroaders, waiting between runs.

They found seats and Jim lit a cigarette.

"Well, Zeb, I'll run over and turn in your application and to-morrow you can come out with me and learn the road. You wait here. I'll be back in a few minutes as soon as I can give this to the old man."

Jim left and Zeb sat listening to the talk around him. A phrase here, a sentence there.

"Yeh, we was batting it heavy when, blue-ee, the automobile run right in our face! Say, we twirled it sixty times over an' over. Yeh, it was full of guys. They all went to hell. Sure, they was drunk, pickled for fair. Never saw our headlight nor heard the crossing blow."

Interested, Zeb glanced at the speaker. Evidently he had been on an engine when they hit an automobile. The casual way

he referred to it made little creepy feelings run up and down Zeb's back.

His attention was attracted by a loud guffaw.

He looked across the room where a big man stood, head thrown back laughing. "Haw, haw, and he went clear back fer a left hand monkey wrench! Haw! Haw! Haw! He was good, that guy. Just out of the country. Green as grass. We razzed him for fair."

Railroading. These men off duty talked of nothing but the railroad. Zeb wondered why they didn't go uptown, why they didn't read, why they didn't get away from the railroad during their few leisure hours. But Zeb was green, as green as the one who had gone for the left handed monkey wrench. He soon was to learn of the all-absorbing fascination of the road that grips a man to the exclusion of all else.

He saw Jim making his way through the lobby toward him and rose to meet him.

"Well, kiddo, you're all fixed up now."

As they left the room he remarked: "That bunch in there, don't let 'em put anything over on you. They have more wrecks in there in an hour than the division has in a year—and pull cars! Say, if some of them 'hogheads' could jerk the trains with an engine they pull up the hills with their mouth, there wouldn't be but two trains a day on the whole road, one each way and an extra car behind one on pay day. If they could work the air from the brake valve as smooth as they do from their faces, they would never smash a draw bar either," Jim concluded.

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING THE GRADE.

NEXT morning Zeb woke with a start from a deep sleep. The opening of the bedroom door had caused him to sit bolt upright, wide awake in bed. Beside him, Jim still slept heavily. A lantern, dim and smoky, advanced.

A boy, with a black book in his hand, approached and yelled: "All right, old head! Sign the book. You're called for the West End Local."

Jim stirred and awoke. "Lo, Snaky. All right," and reaching over Zeb he ran the pencil "across the line."

With many a grunt and a sigh, he arose, stretched and turned on the light. The call boy went out, slamming the door behind him.

Zeb glanced at his watch. "Half past four," he said, following Jim.

He washed in the big white bowl and pushed himself into his working clothes. Jim picked up his lantern from beside the dresser, lit it and walking quietly so as to not disturb the other sleepers, the two stole down the stairs and out into the darkness of the deserted street. Their footfall sounded loud and menacing as they made their way down toward Ring's restaurant. All the life and movement of the day was gone and the street in front of the depot seemed muggy and depressing, a cold, clammy thing, dead and uninviting.

The depot, ugly, gaunt, its darkened windows looking like missing teeth in a moldering skull, leered across at them. In one corner a sickly yellow glare of light shone out from the despatcher's room. the rest of the building was barren and barn-like.

Ring's was lit up by one light high overhead. The stools in front of the counter were empty, a gutter of cigarette stubs, torn paper and half burned cigar butts littered the floor. On the back table a lantern turned low burned in a feeble flicker, outlining the bowed head and shoulders, the red handkerchief above the blue jumper collar of a man asleep, snoring loudly as he slumped across the table.

Behind the counter a waiter in a stained jacket sat on a stool, his head thrown back, breathing slowly and heavily through his open mouth. Jim banged abruptly on the smeared white stone of the counter top with his lantern.

The waiter awoke with a start and stared at the two.

"What'll you have?" he mumbled, rising to his feet.

"Ham an', and a couple of Javas."

Without a word he shambled back toward the kitchen and before long the sputter of grease and the smell of cooking

trickled out gradually as the mists creep up from the creek bottoms. Zeb felt a curious sense of self pity; for the first time in his life lonesomeness, deep and soul stirring, welled up within him.

He was homesick. The coming of dawn here was a depressing thing unlike the dawn in the mountains. There the gloom of night slowly lifted. The day unveiled itself with the song of birds, the gentle rustle of the wind in the trees and the faint pink smear of daylight across the eastern sky. At home he awoke, went out into the cool morning, refreshed and clear headed. Here the break of day seemed a sodden thing, murky and heavy.

They finished the meal, walked across the street, black and wet, shining with dew, passed through the employees' gate and entered the yards. From far down the tracks a switch engine broke into the stillness with a sharp yet dull rattle of the exhaust followed by the clang of rolling cars stopping suddenly.

"Making up the Local," explained Jim as they walked along the cinder path between the tracks. "Wonder what mill they'll give us to-day?"

The roundhouse with its open doors, the back ends of a score of engines sticking out, protruded out of the drifting mists of steam before them across the big gaping hole of the turntable pit. A torch wavered, moved erratically in swinging arcs, approaching the two. A face smeared with splotches of grease became plainer as a machinist, hammer and chisel in hand, drew near.

"What's chalked up for the West End Local to-day?" asked Jim.

"Oh, we'll have to run the 817. She's the only extra in the house," was the reply.

Jim turned to Zeb as the machinist passed by the two in the direction of the coal chute.

"Say, boy, we're in luck. We get a eight hundred class. Watch us wheel 'em. The eights are fine steamers, superheaters. We'll take a bunch of box cars out for a real ride to-day," Jim laughed.

A voice called behind and Johnny Deering, the engineer, overtook them.

"817 to-day, Jim. A hot fire and a quick run is the order. Hello, kid!" He ad-

dressed Zeb. "Coming along, are you? We'll twist the monkey's tail to-day. A good jack and three good men."

Three short hoots of a deep-toned whistle, the turntable with a jerk and grind of gears, *gra-ump*, *gra-ump*, rolled in its circle. The 817, a sleepy looking hostler at the throttle, moved out of the roundhouse, and with jarring thumps, as tender trucks and engine drivers passed the break between the house track and table rails, she rolled on to the turntable. A deeper rumble of clattering gears and the table swung a quarter turn, lined up on the coal track, and with a short blast of the whistle the 817 again bumped off the table.

She stopped, the hostler climbed down and addressed John Deering.

"She's all yours," he said. "Sanded, air tested. I filled the lubricator for you. All you gotta do is take on a little coal and run her till the wheels drop off."

"Thanks, old dusty," the engineer replied. "I'll take you out and get you drunk some pay day for that." Then turning to Zeb: "All right, kid. Climb aboard."

Through the narrow gangway between engine and tank, up the three cast iron tender steps, holding on to the bent pipe grab irons, Zeb wormed his way on to the deck of the cab. Sitting down on the left hand seat box that Jim motioned out to him, he watched the process of putting in a fire. With the long slice bar, an iron rod, twelve feet over all, one end bent into a handle, the other turned into a two-tined hook, Jim broke up the bed of glowing clinker. Throwing his weight on the bar pivoted half its length across the fire door, he tugged and twisted, and raked out a red hot lump of fused metallic slag as large as a half bushel.

"Gotta have a clean bed," he explained to Zeb, "or you'd never keep her hot. Not only that, if you let your fire ball up, first thing you know, you've burned out a set of grates."

He sprinkled a layer of coal, shovel after shovelful, over his fire. While Johnny Deering drove the engine down the yard track, Jim was talking.

"Lay the coal on light, keep a light fire a going all the time. Cover up the bright

spots and you'll soon make a regular transfer agent."

"Transfer agent?" questioned Zeb.

Jim grinned broadly at his own joke. "Sure. Transfer about ten ton o' coal from the tender into the fire box in a trip."

"That's a heap o' coal," Zeb said.

"Hell, that's nothing," Jim continued. "I use ter fire on the main line, and one time I moved fifteen tons o' coal in ten hours. That's what I call firing. The monkeys like to got me, though, before the run was over."

Zeb said nothing. What the "monkeys" meant he had not the faintest idea, but kept quiet rather than ask any unnecessary questions.

All the time the two were talking, the engine was moving ahead, stopping for switches, working her way down to the head of her train that waited, made up in the yard. Zeb watched as the engineer threw the reverse lever toward the rear of the cab. The engine backed. There was a jar of impact, a clang when the coupler knuckles locked on tender and box car, followed a second later by a sighing *woosh* as the air from the engine reservoir filled the train line. Behind him he saw a lantern wave when the brakeman signaled: "O K."

The conductor ran up from the yard office.

"All right!" he yelled from the back, two or three car lengths. "Wrap 'em up and take 'em away!"

John Deering jerked the hanging whistle cord and with a low "toot-toot," the West End local moved forward to the urge of the opened throttle. The double pump on the left hand side just in front of the cab raced up and down pumping up the air pressure.

Zeb had almost forgotten the lonesome, homesick feeling that gripped him so strong a little while before. In the light reflected from the cab, each car on the track beside him loomed up out of the darkness for a minute, was passed and faded into the darkness again. Deeply interested, he noted the names and letters on each passing car. Here was a Mexican Central from far down South in the land of sombrero and revolution, touching couplers with a

Canadian Pacific grain car that had seen the snow covered prairies of western Manitoba and had heard the wolf's howl in the still night of northern winters. A hopper bottom coal car from the mines of West Virginia rubbed bumpers with a yellow painted, ventilated fruit dispatcher from the grape vineyards of Southern California.

Boston and Maine, Mississippi and Yahoo Valley, Denver and Rio Grande, Nickel Plate, Panhandle, Big Four, Queen and Crescent, C. C. and O.—freighters from ten million square miles of country, all brought together for a brief time only to be separated, and by the laws of chance never again to be joined together in ten million meetings.

Zeb, whose traveling was now at the farthest goal that he had ever known, looked at these transcontinental travelers who counted their journeys by the hundreds, their mileage by the thousand, and was a bit awed. Vaguely to his understanding there came the glamour of railroading: to move the goods and products of a nation was more than mere traffic. There was romance in the clicking engine wheels; there was mystery in those grimy box cars; there was adventure to be had on the railroad, far more than the shut-in hills and deep valleys of his mountain home had to offer. There was risk, too, in railroading.

The engine was nearing the end of the yard. The yard limit post, a white finger like a thin marker over a grave, was dimly revealed in the blue gray light of dawn. A switcher clanged down the track toward them. A brakeman stood directly in its path, a ghostly figure silhouetted in the strong glare from its electric light, his lantern bung over his arm, his brake stick held in his left hand. As the switch engine approached, he raised one foot. Stiff-legged, he stood, his poised leg pointing at the rapidly nearing step.

Risky, dangerous way to get on, thought Zeb. What if he miscalculated, what if his foot missed?

The brakeman gave a little hop, his leg touched the step—slipped sideways. The lantern flew off in a wide arc, the brake stick followed and as the 817 passed on

the opposite track, there was a crunch that Zeb likened to a hound's teeth snapping over a rabbit. A scream, muffled yet piercing, rang out and the brakeman disappeared under the engine.

Wide-eyed, trembling, Zeb's mind pictured the man under that steel juggernaut, writhing, twisting, squirming, the life being remorselessly smashed from him. Unable to speak at the shock of witnessing his first tragedy, Zeb turned a white face toward Jim, who was swinging his shovel back and forth as he fed the fire.

Something in his looks attracted the fireman. "What's the matter, kid? See a ghost?"

Zeb pointed back. "Stop, stop! A man!" he gasped. "A man run over!"

"We hit him?" the fireman asked.

"No, getting on the front of that air other engine, he slipped and got run over."

Crossing over to the other side of the cab, Jim repeated Zeb's story to the engineer in a few words. They spoke for a couple of minutes and the fireman returned to the seat box.

"It's all right, old-timer," he assured Zeb. "Some shack on the yard crew got nipped. Nothing much. They trim off a few loose legs every day or two. Just keep it to yourself. No use getting balled up in a lawsuit. Lose a lotta time, get nothing fer it but trouble. You never saw it if any one asks you. That's the best way. I'm giving it to you straight."

But in spite of the fireman's words, Zeb could not shut out that scene from his eyes nor that pain proclaiming groan from his ears. And as the local moved along, "cha-chuckety-chug, cha-chuckety-chug," out past the yard limit and on to the main line, his first lesson in his new calling came hard. He realized that human life is incidental on the railroad, and like a great impersonal force, the trains must move on regardless of human woes or pains.

The homesickness of the early morning was entirely forgotten now in the greater feelings that the accident had given birth to. He wondered if his engine would ever kill a man, and he made up his mind, filled as it was then with the overwhelming sense of sorrow for that unknown who so swiftly

had slipped from life before his very eyes, that if he did, he'd quit the day he ran a human being under.

Jim's voice broke into his reveries. "All right, Zeb. It's all yours," looking up to the steam gage whose pointer trembled on the black dial just below the one-hundred-and-seventy-five-pound mark. "Let's see you pop her."

Zeb took the shovel, turned his back toward the engineer, and was reaching for the fire door chain when he was stopped in his swing by the sound of loud laughing. The fireman and engineer both guffawed.

"What's the matter?" asked Zeb in surprise.

"Listen, kid," said Jim. "Never turn your back on the engineer. See that pad," pointing to the left hand corner of the cab.

Zeb looked to where a pad covered the sharp corner rounding out the wood with a canvas bumper.

"Put your back against that. Now," as Zeb obeyed, "fill your scoop, now jerk open the door, slam in the coal, close the door and do it over again!"

The thing that had appeared so easy to Zeb became a very hard thing to execute. To brace solidly on the slippery moving cab deck, to fill the scoop and to sling the coal into the narrow fire door, was not an art to be learned in a day.

But Zeb was determined. Although his scoop hit sides, top and bottom of the door oftener than it landed fair, yet he persevered. An hour passed, two hours. The local moved on in its short, jerky runs, stopped for longer or shorter periods, and moved on again. Still Zeb, grim-faced, perspiring, his back aching, his arms dead tired, banged the fire door open and closed, gritting his teeth every time the scoop missed the door.

For the first part of the morning, the steam had dropped on him. Slowly the hand slid back—170, 165, 160. There it hung for what seemed an eternity. Firing became a game, a hard endeavor to Zeb. To shovel coal into the blazing fire box, to twist and pull at the slice bar, to jerk and tug at the shaker handle—a game of straining muscles, painful legs, and a back that felt as limber as a hickory sprout.

Finally the engineer spoke, looking down at Zeb who stood, feet aspraddle, perspiration standing out in big drops and running in rivulets down his grimed face: "Bud, take it easy. You're wasting yourself. You got enough coal in there now to steam her for two hours."

The fireman agreed. "You was a hitting it so good, kid, I hated to stop you. But the best way to learn how to fire right is to learn how to fire wrong. Here, lemme show you."

He pulled the slice bar down from the tender, raked the coal evenly across the fire, and protecting his hand from the hot iron with a piece of waste, he slid the bar back on the tender.

"Come on here, now, and sit down," he motioned to the seat beside him. "And watch yer steam crawl up."

Zeb slumped down, stuck his head out the window, elbow crooked on the sill. This was as he had often pictured himself. But there was no thrill now. A great weariness hung heavy on him and he scarcely saw the foliage along the right of way. It was different, very different, from the way he had expected. There didn't seem to be any excitement to the job, just work—hard, incessant toil. It was no fun at all, this stoking an engine.

"Never mind, kid," Jim's voice rang in his ears. "I'll show you now. No use before you got shovel-wise, because you couldn't understand. Fire 'em light, cross fire, sprinkle your coal, a shovel in one corner, the next one in the opposite corner of the fire box. Go around, no two in the same place, and you'll be surprised how easy it is."

Zeb started to get down. "Never mind, now. She'll pop in a minute without any more fire in her. Sit down and take it easy."

In a few minutes Zeb jumped clear of his seat as a shuddering, vibrating roar burst suddenly over the engine. The fireman laughed, pointed at the steam gauge that showed one hundred and seventy-five pounds, flicked the injector back a notch, halted for a second and pulled the handle all the way back. The roar fluttered a time or two, the pops seated, and only the rum-

ble of the water flowing through the branch pipe into the boiler could be heard.

"What you pull that air handle for?" Zeb asked.

Jim said: "You see the glass," indicating the water gauge. "Well, watch the line crawl up. This"—touching the injector—"puts the water into the boiler. Whenever she gets hot and near popping, you want to open the gun like I just did. Pull her back a little, wait till you feel her thump, then open her wide. The cold water soon cools her down and she'll stop blowing off."

The fireman shut off the injector, the rumble ceased, and the local that had been standing at a station got under way again.

After a few minutes Jim reminded, "Better be puttin' in a fire. Mind now, what I said. Sprinkle the coal light, kid, and it'll come easy."

In an hour Zeb had the engine popping again. He opened the injector and heard the rumble of the water, the thump of the column lifting the boiler check. A feeling of supremacy thrilled through him. It wasn't at all hard. He was learning the trick. Of course he would get better at firing as he got the experience, but the worst was over. A smile lit up his face, the first smile of the day and he broke into a broad grin at the words of praise from Jim.

"Kid, you're all right. That's the quickest I've ever seen any one learn to fire a jack."

Zeb grinned thankfully back, tired but happy. His glance idly turned ahead. There, just showing the corner of its red roof around the curve, was the station of Ecclefechan. He had no idea that he had run this far. It seemed as though but an hour or two had passed since they left the yards.

CHAPTER V.

"ITCHY-WITCHY."

AT the close of the eighteenth century, Wales was in a turmoil. The religious differences between England and the little principality of the Welsh were the cause of many a bitter argument,

and led to the central government enforcing harsh measures against their dissenters. But America offered a refuge from tyranny. Here was a wilderness sparsely settled, its resources beyond all reckoning, where a man might make his own rules and laws. Small wonder, then, that of the various sects that sought freedom of belief by emigrating, the Welsh were among the first.

From Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, from Monmouthshire and Aberystwyth, they gathered, crossed the Atlantic to the vast territory of Virginia, and headed west, seeking a country like the one they had left. Across the plains into the rolling hills they made their slow way until after many weary months they found themselves up on the watershed of the Appalachians.

Here was a country like their own. Here was the oak in a half a hundred different species and the groves of hemlock. Here the mistletoe could be seen in clumps, and the long drawn howl of the wolf rang out over the rocky hills in the night. Patient, industrious, earnest, the Welshmen started to make their homes in this new, strange land. They builded well, even like the houses they had left in the homeland. Butt and ben, front and back of rough granite rock, hewn oaken beams a foot square supporting the roofs, big open fireplaces furnished with the crane and andirons they had carried for three thousand miles, they built homes to last the centuries through, those pioneers.

And the centuries passed. The builders went the way of all the living, leaving behind them well-cleared fields, sleek cattle as the tangible results of their industry. Others came over the trail they marked along the river courses and up through the gap between the hills — English, Scotch, and Irish. The houses grew in number, and a little town formed in the flat bottom beside the trail now cut into a well-worn road. There was intermarriage. New families arrived and the place became cosmopolitan. A name — Ecclefechan was English enough for the English and Welsh enough for the Welsh — and the Irish didn't care what it was called. Sure, it's never a bit like the blessed island, anyhow, they reasoned.

Cosmopolitan it became, and yet, through the whole fabric of the community modified by the passing years, changed by shifting conditions, ran the dominant thread of the Welsh. Here were the light blue eyes and golden hair, a heritage of the Saxon of King Ethelred's victorious legions of ten centuries before. Here was the broad shouldered, heavy armed man in whose veins flowed the blood of the Danish sea rover who had settled forgotten generations before on the shores of Cardigan Bay.

Just as these people brought their names and their religion intact from the land of their birth, so they had carried their desire for learning. The church that stood at the head of the valley was flanked by the schoolhouse above it. There was no illiteracy among them, and most of the youth of Ecclefechan went down into the flat country that lay below the mountains and finished their education in some college.

At this school Zeb White had acquired the rudiments of an education, the cause of many a bitter word at home. He remembered how his father had denounced the "larnin'" of the "furriners" as the mountaineers called the folks below. He recalled his father's words, "fiesty tyke, he'll be a tryin' to run over all o' us uns with his book larnin' arter he goes to the school."

He had groused and growled, but Zeb's mother, who had come up from the valley herself, stood firm. For three seasons Zeb went to school, acquired his "larnin'" — and had met Ithca Yspyddy.

The mountaineers had a fine contempt for the "furriners," a contempt based on a deep-rooted jealousy which Zeb did not share. For the "furriner" was there first, the Welshman had preempted the rich, fat bottom lands for his fields and meadows and the rolling hills that fringed them for his pastures and orchards. When the later arrivals, the ones who lacked the initiative and resourcefulness to be the first to break away from home and venture into the unknown, had followed, there were but the rocky hills, the steep-sided gulleys, the small flats above the creek beds for them to settle on. And as the qualities that were so prominent in the "furriner" were lacking in the later emigrants, the advantage

of the first arrivals was still the advantage of their descendants.

And the Welsh names of David and Llewelyn, Powys and Dynevor, even now told the tale of that long unbroken lineage that stretched back to the days of cross bows, moated castles and chain armor. Hard-working, earnest people they all were, these farmers of the bottoms of Ecclefechan. And none showed more the effects of earnest toil than the farm that skirted the railroad, the farm of David Yspytty. Yspytty was a name as well known for the oddness of its lettering as for the fairness of the daughters of the house.

Now the name Ithca Yspytty is a tongue-twisting, stuttering mouthful for a grown-up to articulate. How much more so must it have been for a little blue-eyed, flaxen-haired girl baby? "Itchy-Witchy" was the nearest she had ever got to naming herself, and as Itchy-Witchy she was known.

Here David, he of the broad shoulders and slow speech, kept his neat and well-tilled fields no more carefully than his daughter, Ithca, managed the affairs of the household. She was young, not yet seventeen, and yet for six years, since her mother's death, she was mistress of the house. If floors scrubbed to the color of birch bark and copper kettles shining like the setting sun were any standard, the girl had followed the pattern set by her mother before her, a pattern that the mountain women who came as servants found difficult to learn. Her method of housekeeping was as different to these women as the blue eyes and golden hair that her mother's mothers had been blessed with back to some long-forgotten Saxon was from their straight black hair and dark, mournful eyes.

As the local passed along the rock wall that hedged her father's well-kept fields, pulled into Ecclefechan and stopped, Zeb glanced ahead. There, on a pile of newly hewed cross-ties, sat his father, idly whittling on a piece of pine, stopping every now and then to spit when he rolled his cud of "homemade" from one cheek to the other.

Zeb, from the cab, watched this aimless,

idle, poor white trash, who let his women do the work on the haphazard hillside farm. Then his glance rested on the neat fields in the bottom, free from stump or rock, the corn in orderly rows, the trim solid rock houses, the black Castlemartin cattle, imported from the old country, and the flocks of small mountain sheep, grazing on the slopes of the hills.

In a second the full significance of the reason for the difference between the people of the valley and the mountaineers above, struck home to him. Work. The lowlanders were industrious, the hill people lazy.

He himself was tired, for that morning had been the first hard, continuous labor he had ever done. When he worked at home he stopped whenever he wanted to, went hunting or fishing. The work of the mountain folk was spasmodic and easily interrupted. These people with the strange sounding names, toiled regularly, winter and summer, and were rich thereby. And into Zeb's mind, following the discovery, came the promise. He, too, would work; he, too, would have the things that industry brought. He gazed up at the clearing below the dilapidated cabin where he was born. A glimpse of a figure in the doorway attracted his attention. His mother.

He must get word to her that he was all right. How? The local would not stop long enough for him to run up there and back, a good forty minutes' trip. If he could but send some one. But who to send? His father must not yet know where he was or he might try to take him back home. No, he wouldn't let his father know. But he must get a message up to his mother somehow, some way.

His glance swept around back down the train on the opposite side from the depot. A girl approached, a basket over her arm, down the cinder path alongside the tracks. Zeb recognized her instantly. It was Itchy-Witchy.

He walked down to meet her.

"Howdy," he greeted.

She stopped, stared at him for a second, wide eyed, then recognition spread in a smile over her face.

"Why, hello, Zeb! I didn't know you. All dressed in overalls, red handkerchief, and gloves. What—what are you doing?" she asked, puzzled.

In a few words Zeb explained proudly. "I'm a railroadin'. A larnin' the road. I'm a goin' to be a fireman."

A look of approbation from the girl that made Zeb's heart thump a bit faster, and he continued: "Pap's a loaferin' over thar at the station, and I don't aim fer him to kotch up with me. He don't keer much about me workin' out. Will you-all go up thar to my maw and tell her ye seed me, and I'm all right and a workin' and—and—Give her this yere money." Pulling out the ten-dollar bill intact that Jim had given him. "And," he added quickly, "tell her not to say a word to pap about hit. Jest keep hit fer herself and I'll be a sendin' word to her every wunst in a while."

"Yes, I'll do as you say, Zeb," she replied. "I'm going up the hill now, a dewberrying, and I'll stop by and give her your message."

The whistle on the engine ahead sounded two long blasts.

When Zeb turned to leave, she said hurriedly, "My, but you're the proud one, going railroading, aren't you?"

Zeb started to speak, could not find the words to say, and with a hasty, "Thank you, kindly, Itchy-Witchy. I'll be a seein' you all along," he trotted back to the engine.

Jim was standing in the gangway when Zeb came alongside the tender.

"Oh, oh!" he greeted playfully. "Who's the jane you were chewing the fat with out there, zeb? Why didn't you give me a shake down to her?"

Zeb climbed aboard before answering. "Jim, that thar warn't no jane. That's Itchy-Witchy, and I was just askin' her to take word to maw fer me."

Jim noted the earnest face, stopped a minute before replying. "Zeb, old-timer, I didn't mean nothing. Let it go by like you never heard me, won't you?"

Zeb laughed. "I knowed ye were not a throwin' off, but Itchy-Witchy is—well, jest Itchy-Witchy."

The 817 barked loud, and the local

moved away from Ecclefechan. Zeb put in a fire, got up on the seat box and looked back up the mountain side toward his home. A figure appeared on the road at the edge of the bottom. Zeb waved his hand. A flutter of a white handkerchief replied, and the local turned a curve, cutting out the view. Itchy-Witchy had waved to him.

The local pulled into the siding and waited for No. 16. Zeb scarcely heard the whistle of the passenger, scarcely noticed the flash of the cars as they rattled by, for his eyes held the image of a girl with a thick wealth of golden hair, red cheeked, with white teeth and a low, soft voice. And the words she had spoken, "My, but you're the proud one," turned until he fancied their meaning was that she, not he, was the one who was glad at his new found position.

The local ran ahead, took the switch onto the Y, and backed down on the main line again, turning for its return trip. Zeb was doing the firing now. He had caught the knack.

It was not so difficult to keep up the head of steam, and he was not exerting himself one-half as much as he had in the morning. It was easy. He put in a couple of fires and looked out at Ecclefechan again coming into view.

The station was deserted. Zeb gave a searching glance for his father, but he was not to be seen. Neither was Itchy-Witchy, he realized with a little sinking feeling. Funny, he thought, often as he had seen her before, he never felt this way about her. The mountain boy in patched homespun had considered her, the only daughter of a wealthy "surriner," entirely outside his plane of life.

But now he was no longer a "poor white trash." He was a railroader. Many things that were inconceivable and beyond him before, were attainable. He would buy good clothes, save his money, build a home at the terminal, take his mother and sisters in, and live like a king. And perhaps, the thought was followed by the wish, Itchy-Witchy, perhaps, some time when he was an engineer. But he quickly dismissed it, for green as he was to the ways of the road,

he knew it was a long, hard climb across the narrow deck that stretched from the fireman's side of the cab to the engineer's.

CHAPTER VI.

ON HIS OWN.

AS the local drove on, Jim said: "We'll make the run on time to-day. Having it light and easy. I'll take you out stepping to-night. I gotta couple of live ones on the string and we'll go take in a show. Friend of mine promised to bring me in a quart of real white rye. He's got a machine, too. We'll take on our liquid refreshment as we ride. Believe me, kid, we'll put on a party you won't forget soon!"

The engine was drifting down hill. The usual clatter and racket was absent. Only the *cha-chug, cha-chug* of the pump, and the *plup-plup-plup* of the relief valves sounded above the rattle of her drivers clicking the rail joints.

The engineer looked across, listening to the fireman's promise. He shook his head warningly.

"Listen, bud," he addressed Zeb. "Take some good advice from one who has suffered. Don't mix up with any of Jim's skirts, and fight shy of the booze that's flowing around Depot Street now. I'm telling you what sure is. I ought to have whiskers to my knees. Instead, all I stand for is the local. Strong drink and fast women knocked my age three different times."

He reached up for the whistle cord, blew a station call, and opened the throttle. "You can't buck 'em, kid. They'll get you sooner or later."

Zeb turned to Jim, who was grinning sheepishly at the engineer's words. The increasing clatter of the engine working steam drowned out the engineer's remarks.

"What did he mean?"

"Oh, Johnny used to throw a grand and glorious spree occasionally. He's been running an engine now for fifteen years, but he only has about eight years age. He was held off a couple of times too long. You know, if a guy is held off for over six

months he loses his standing, age, and has to start in at the bottom again."

"But," Zeb persisted, even though he'd shown his ignorance, "he hasn't got no whiskers."

"Whiskers, that's age," laughed Jim. "The longer your record runs continuous, the more jobs you stand for. Everything goes by the length of continuous service. The man who has the longest record stands for the best runs. That's his whiskers. If he gets the air, fired, for more than six months, he 'gets his whiskers clipped,' and has to begin again. Me, I lost out two years a while back. They had me down for everything. I pitched a spree, and thought it would be a grand joke to take a *jane* out for an engine ride. I tried to, but just got started walking across the yard, laughing and cutting up, when I hears the superintendent's voice behind me. 'You seem to find something very amusing. What's this woman doing in the yards?'"

"Then he gets a whiff of my breath and speaks right out—'You're both drunk.' I'm too fozzled to put up a bluff. We makes a big sneak. You bet I soon sober up and shake the *jane*. Sidewheeler, she was at that. Spent the rest of the night a worrying my head off. Caller broke the sad news to me in the morning. Investigation, up on the carpet. I'm fired. I'm off seven months. Business begins rushing, short of firemen, and I get back. But I've lost my standing, and I have to buck the extra board once more."

Jim shook his head sadly, then nodded to the steam gauge that had been dropping down steadily while they talked, and Zeb jumped to his shovel.

As he shot the coal into the fire the thought ran through his head—"I'm not going to do anything to lose my age. These fellows are funny. To think that a man would throw away his chance for advancement, for a good job, and all that went with it just for a 'jane and the booze.'

The local chugged along, made its stops, got into motion again, and slowly worked back over the road toward home. Zeb was thinking hard about the invitation that Jim had given him. He had no desire to join Jim, and still he felt too indebted to him

to refuse. The spirit of sticking by a friend is strong in the mountain-bred people. For their clannishness is an outstanding trait, and a friend is never forgotten, even, as an enemy is always remembered.

Zeb felt a strong liking for Jim. He would do almost anything for him—even join him in a carouse, but he hoped he could find an excuse without hurting Jim's feelings.

The local pulled into the yards, the brakeman disconnected the engine, they ran back, turned onto the cinder pit track, and a hostler climbed aboard, moved it over the pits while the fire cleaners and ash-pit men swarmed over it like a bunch of ants, grooming it for its next run. While the engineer went into the wash room where his street clothes were waiting in his locker, Zeb and Jim in their overalls crossed the tracks to the hotel.

On the way Zeb began: "Jim, I thank you-all for the offer, but I jest reckon I'd better not go out to-night. I'm sorter tired, and I'll hit my dab o' straw soon."

"Wish you could make it, old head. We're going to have a grand time."

"I know, but you-all know, Jim, I'm not used to such hard work, and I'm sorter feeling tired now."

"I guess that's so," assented Jim. "But come on anyway," he urged as the two mounted the bare stairs up to the third floor where Jim's room was at the front end.

Once inside, Jim threw off his working clothes, washed, shaved, and hurried his preparations in a fair frenzy to be going. Zeb leisurely followed suit, but instead of putting on Jim's "second best" clothes, he again dressed in his overalls, with the words, "Jim, you-all won't be much put out ef I don't foller you to-night?"

"No," said Jim. "That's all right, kid. I've gotta go. Made the date and gotta keep it, but you just make yourself at home. Come on down. Let's feed."

They went down to Ring's, ordered and ate supper, and Jim rushed out to catch a car.

"So long! Expect me when you see me," he flung back over his shoulder.

Zeb returned to the room, and sitting

down on the bed, the events of the day re-enacted themselves through his mind. It seemed months ago since the morning, and the accident was like a dream. He wondered if he really had seen the brakeman go under the switch engine or if he merely fancied it. But that scream was too sharp, too pregnant with pain for fancy. Yes, he decided with a shudder, he had witnessed the impersonal cruelty of the railroad. And the long run out and back, the roar of the exhaust, the bang of cars, the *clickety-clack* of passing rail joints, they were real, for they still sounded loud in his ears.

And Itchy-Witchy. He breathed a deep sigh. She had imprinted herself firmly on his mind. Although he had seen her many times before, he felt as though he never had seen her till to-day. Lucky she had come along, his folks would know he was all right now. His mother—wonder what she did when she got the money—hope she didn't let his father know about it.

Then Jim, reckless, irresponsible, with no thought of the future, Jim out on a wild party, taking another chance on his job, for he had told Zeb they were discharging men right and left for drinking whether they were on duty or not. The whole thing was queer. A couple of days ago if any one had told him that all this could happen so quickly, he would have laughed at the idea.

But it was all true. He was no longer the son of Bill White, doing Bill White's work on the mountain clearing. He was Zeb White, his own man and a railroader.

He got up, the room had darkened with the approach of night, and lit the electric light. A pile of books were stacked haphazard in the corner under a bunch of dusty newspapers. Going over to them, he glanced at the titles. They were uniformly bound, big, heavy volumes, "The Science of Railroading."

Jim, one pay-day, had been out talked by a glib salesman, had signed the contract for a correspondence course, and each month thereafter for a year the instalments were taken from his pay. When the volumes arrived he had glanced through them, read for an hour one evening, then shoved them into a corner with the promise

that he would study them again. They had lain untouched for two years, accumulating a layer of dust, until to-night when Zeb opened one. Spreading it out on the table, he studied the colored illustrations. Here was an engine, turn a page and the interior opened up, another and deeper down into its vitals the engravings depicted the intricate mechanisms.

Fascinated, Zeb began to read. Fortunately the book was the first of the series, and he read of the small beginnings of steam transportation two hundred years before. Eagerly he followed the engrossing story of the development of rail transportation from the days of "Puffing Billy," and a four miles per hour speed, to the high-wheeled flyers on the Twentieth Century that swiftly led its string of heavy vestibuled, all-steel coaches a thousand miles across a half dozen States in but little more than a day.

Here was history far more entralling than any he had ever read. He settled himself deeper in his chair and struggled with Trevithick in his endeavor to work high pressure steam, fought against public opinion with Stevenson as he won the prize with his "Rocket," and finally rode to fame with Baldwin, who as founder of the mighty works that bear his name, is known wherever ringing bell or sounding whistle proclaims a locomotive.

The night hours flew past unnoticed while Zeb read on, buried beyond notice of time in the books that to Jim were volumes of wearisome words. Page after page he turned. Here was the story of the slow advance men had made from the days of oxwain and creaking cart. Zeb's mind was like a fallow field, eager for knowledge. He studied the sectional views of the engines, traced the steam from boiler through throttle valve, down the feed pipes into the cylinders. The flow of the gases hot from the burning coal circling up, sweeping through the flues and out the stack became as plain to him as was the course of the creek that ran down the foot of the corn-field at his home.

Midnight came, yet Zeb did not hear the roundhouse whistle blatantly advertise the hour to the still, starlit night. One o'clock

and he read on. Now he knew what draft sheets and nozzles, what flues and mud rings were. What an ordinary man takes a month to learn, Zeb had assimilated in a night—the mechanical change from water into power, through the medium of expanding steam. Far better than many a man who had spent years on the railroad, he understood the strange alchemy of burning coal and rushing steam that moves the goods and passengers of our modern civilization.

Zeb had discovered that he had a natural aptitude for mechanics, for the diagrams and descriptions were plain to him. He was so absorbed in them that he hardly heard the door open. It took Jim's voice to arouse him.

"Heyho, kid! Ain't you in bed yet?"

Zeb turned around. Jim stood swaying in the middle of the room, a foolish grin on his face. His hat was gone, his suit mud splattered and torn. One of his eyes was blackened and there were cuts and bruises in a half dozen places on his face.

Zeb jumped up alarmed. "What—" he began.

"All right, old timer. Everything's all right. Had a lovely time, a sweet time. We wrecked the Greek's chop joint, turned over a machine and—and got lit up for fair."

Tumbling across the bed, Jim repeated: "Yep, a lovely time. Lit up for fair."

In a few minutes he was asleep, mumbling: "Mished the time of your life."

Zeb pulled off Jim's shoes and torn clothes and rolled him under the covers. Then he opened the window wide, for the stench of whisky was gagging him. He sat up, drowsily studying for a while longer then, not able to stay awake, he turned in beside Jim who, mouth agape, was sleeping the sleep of the drugged.

It seemed to Zeb that he had scarcely fallen asleep when he felt some one shaking him roughly. He looked up into a lantern that cast its yellow glare into his blinking eyes.

He heard a voice sounding far off in his drowsy ears.

"Jim, you're called for the local. Wake up and sign the book!"

Jim never stirred. Zeb added his voice to that of the other and they both tried to awaken him. He slept on, serenely unconscious to the combined effort of the call boy and Zeb to arouse him. After ten minutes of pounding and pulling at his limp figure, the call boy left. Zeb heard him cursing fervently as his footsteps beat a diminishing tattoo down the stairs.

Fifteen minutes later the caller returned with another man, the chief caller who was a past master in the art of waking sleepers. Without a word, he reached across Zeb. There was a quick salvo of sharp slaps. Jim half arose. One hand on each side of his head, the caller rubbed Jim's ears in a swift rolling movement.

"Ouch! Leggo!" Jim yelped in an agonized cry, and sat bolt upright, holding a hand over each smarting ear.

"You're called for the local. It's waiting now. Stagger up and get into 'em!" ordered his tormentor.

"T'ell with the local! T'ell with you!" cursed Jim. "I'm off to-day. I'm sick. Call some one else."

"There's no one else to call. Everybody's marked up. You gotta go."

Jim turned a disgusted look upon the other. "Nothing doing. Absolutely nothing doing. I ain't gotta do nothing but die and you can't make me do that."

As an afterthought he added: "If you want some one so bad, take me frien' here. He'll go. I'll see you so far in hell, an asbestos postal 'ull be scorched black before you get it, before I fire a damn bit to-day. I'm all in. I'm sick. Mark me off."

Threats and entreaties by the caller had no effect on Jim. For twenty minutes both Zeb and the caller argued and pleaded, but Jim refused to get up, and finally he turned his back on the pair and went to sleep again. The caller stamped out, slammed the door and Zeb, wide awake, wondered what would happen next, a vague fear that Jim was due for trouble assailing him. Ten minutes passed when the caller reappeared.

As he came into the room he questioned in a troubled voice: "Kid, can you keep an engine hot?"

Without a minute's hesitation Zeb replied: "Sure, I can."

"All right," was the reply. "I'm going to get in dutch, I guess, for running you, but you're my one chance. I can't get any one else. Get a curve on you. The local's a half hour late now, waiting in the yards. Step lively. While you dress, I'll go down to Ring's and have him put you up some grub. You can eat after you get out on the rails."

With another muttered threat at Jim's lax figure on the bed, the caller vanished.

Zeb hurried into his clothes and fairly running made his way up the yards, in a frenzy at the thought that he was delaying a train. When he reached the engine out of breath, the crew was waiting and the engineer, John Deering, was firing. He climbed aboard, took the shovel and the local was soon under way.

The first question the engineer asked was: "Whattenhell's matter with Jim?"

"Oh, he's sick this mawnin'."

The engineer nodded his head wisely. "Sick? Yeh, I guess he's knocked out. I know. I saw him racing past the depot about ten o'clock. He had a wild party last night. But the old man razzles him ragged."

Then regretfully: "Jim's a good fellow, but he's pulling his horn too hard. I'm afraid he's about due for the grand bounce, and if he gets it, he's through railroadin' on this division for a long time. Well, kid, it's up to you to keep her hot to-day, and if you do, I'll sign you up O. K. to-night."

The local passed the yard limit post, straightened out on to the main line and settled into her steady stride while Zeb, his heart pounding, watched and stoked the fire carefully. He'd keep her hot, all right, he proudly promised himself, for to-day he was on his own.

CHAPTER VII.

WORD FROM HOME.

ZEB had little time for conversation, for he discovered that his fire had not been cleaned. A heavy layer of half burned coal and cinder covered the sluggish bed of coals below. It was just as the fire tenders in the roundhouse had

left it, banked for the night. His hook was soon clanging against the coked fire even as Jim had taught him. Back and forth he tumbled the lumps, raked out the heavy clinker, shook the grates and carefully spread a light layer of coal on the hot level bed of the fire.

He glanced up at the steam gauge that showed a low boiler pressure, then at the level in the water glass. Half a head of steam, low water and looking back at the tender, he finished the unspoken sentence, dirty coal, for the pile that slid between the coal gate on to the steel shovel plate was as fine as roadside dust.

The engineer called over to him. "Bud, we got the tonnage to-day. Ten solid cars of machinery for the new tannery and a big bunch of local stuff besides. Kin you keep her a rolling?"

"Cap, I'll shore try," Zeb replied.

The engineer nodded approval, adding: "Well, if you get petered, just yell and I'll stick in a few fires to spell you off. It's going to be a hard day all right, for a green man."

The engine slowed down, stopped at the junction, where the West End Division branched off from the main line. During the ten minutes they waited for a clear track, Zeb improved the time by getting in a good fire. Cracking the blower valve beside him, he listened with satisfaction to the rumble as the induced draft roared and sucked at the fire, while the steam pressure, pound by pound, eased the needle up around the dial.

Just before the popping mark Zeb opened the injector. Tentatively, he tried it. There seemed to be a mystery about that little black handle that slid back so easily. He had read the night before of the strange mechanics of the injector, that cunningly contrived device which moves water, lifts it up and sends it rushing into a boiler against the steam pressure, the very pressure that causes it to function.

The words of Jim's books—condensation, vacuum, momentum of a head of water, came back to him, but he had not yet fully realized the complicated interplay of forces that took place when he jerked the handle and a rumbling, clicking noise

of running water followed. The black line on the water gauge rose up, up till it almost was hidden in the top of the ribbed glass.

The engineer opened the top gauge cock. A gurgling hiss issued out and he called: "All right, kid. You got her full. Don't want to get too much in or we'll be working water instead of steam. It'll wash all the oil out of her valves and cylinders. Then there's the devil to pay, no lubrication, cut valves, ground out piston packing and scored rods."

He looked up as a semaphore in front of them swayed, moved, then swung its tail down. A clear track, a "hoot-hoot!" from the whistle and Zeb glanced back, saw a hand wave up and down from the rear of the train.

"What's he say?" asked the engineer, jerking his head toward the back end.

"Up and down," answered Zeb as he had heard Jim explain a go-ahead sign yesterday.

The throttle jerked open and *flam-flam-flam!* harsh, abrupt, loud ringing, the exhaust roared out the stack when the local moved and got under way. For an hour it puffed and chugged along the level where the tracks followed the river. Then it started up a slight grade that would take it among the foothills, up higher through the gaps, higher still along the cuts on the face of the hills till it came to Ecclefechan.

While Zeb fired shovel after shovel of the run of mine coal that was almost all slack and dust, he was dismayed to notice the steam pressure steadily falling. At each stop by vigorous use of his shovel, he worked the needle a few pounds higher, but the stops were short this morning, and the slow runs with the reverse lever well down and the throttle wide open, not only used up the steam fast, but the heavy draft that roared through the stack sucked the life out of the fire.

Bang-crash! the shovel grated against the steel shovel sheet and clanged through the fire door opening. Over and over again, Zeb bowed his back, crooked his arms, straightened, lined his coal into the insatiable maw glowing before him. The force of the draft picked the coal dust up

and whirled it through the flues and high out the stack where the cinders, red hot, jumped into the air, circled back and pattered along the car roofs. But a third of the coal fell on the fire, the rest winnowed through the boiler and into the front end or out into the air. And try as he might, the needle dropped pound by pound. The exhaust took on a lower note, the drivers slowed down, slower and slower, till the engine almost stalled.

The engineer rested his eyes on Zeb's face, red from exertion and streaked with perspiration.

Pointing to the hose dangling from the injector, he called: "Open the gun, Old Weary. Wet your coal down. You ain't firing. You're just dusting the scenery now."

Zeb obeyed, sprayed the load in the tender copiously with the hot water from the injector branch pipe. Grasping his shovel, he again began to fire. Ah, this was better! The water bound the fine coal together and most of it stayed where he placed it on the fire. The hand on the steam gauge stopped its downward crawl, stood still, then, painfully, so slow that it was almost unnoticeable, began its upward climb.

But Zeb was about fatigued. His breath came in gasps, his arms felt as though they each weighed a ton, his back pained, the muscles in his legs were sore. He crawled up on the seat box, his head swam when he gulped the fresh breeze. Sparks and spangles of light ziz-zagged before his eyes, a sullen, heavy roar boomed in his ears, and "thump-thump," rapid and body torturing, his heart pounded like the solid throb of the air pumps before him.

Jim's words came back to him. That was it. The "monkeys" had him. For a couple of minutes he lay over the cab sill, the pains of overexertion welling through him. He felt as though his cramped hands were unable to close over a shovel handle again. He turned around and looked at the gauge. It had climbed up a couple of the little white lines that circumscribed the black face. The steam was rising. The engine took on a newer note, while the exhaust quickened its

tempo. And Zeb, a blind determination filling him, began to fire again.

The words "I'll not give up. I'll not give in," blended and mixed with the roar and pound of the engine and, methodically, doggedly, he shoveled, flogging on his tired muscles by sheer will. For he must not be beaten, he must succeed. There were many things depending on him. And in spite of his tiredness, his utter bodily fatigue, his thoughts jumped to Itchy-Witchy. A desperate will to do flamed up in him. His back straightened, his muscles stiffened and, gritting his teeth, he attacked the coal pile as though it were an enemy to be destroyed. He'd work and win her respect.

The morning dragged along, seemingly as slow to Zeb as the forward movement of the heavy train behind. He pulled out his watch, the watch that Jim had given him. Jim sure was a good fellow. He liked him with a strong liking, and yet through his affection for his friend of a few short days, there was a little thread of disgust. The drink, the way he squandered his money, the carelessness and worst of all, Sidewheeler. And Sidewheeler, reckless and flaming, with her blue-black hair, her snapping eyes, her carmine lips, her swinging gait, Sidewheeler, the tiger lily of the depot section.

Unconsciously Zeb's thoughts fastened on another with her shy but friendly manner, her straightforward, deep blue eyes, her healthy looking face. One was fire, hot and destroying, the other was the soft sunshine, cheering and warming. Itchy-Witchy, wonder if she would be near the depot today, wonder what she would say?

He was brought out of his reverie abruptly by the pop valves opening. A sweet sense of satisfaction stole over him. This massive thing of steel and steam, of power, with its insatiable maw, was conquered. He had mastered the trick. Never again would an engine loom big and menacing to him, for he had fired one to the popping point, up grade, full tonnage behind and with poor coal.

The local came to a hissing stop. The cars of machinery were uncoupled, shoved into a siding and a quarter of an hour

later, the train moved away toward Ecclefechan, the next stop. As they rounded the curve before the settlement, Zeb leaned far out of the cab window, his eyes searching for a sign of the girl. His heart gave a jump as he saw her approaching down the road toward the tracks.

The train was slowing down when Zeb, with a glance at his steam and water, climbed down, swung off and walked toward her. Her dress of light blue accentuated the golden hair and red of her cheeks. He never had seen anything that looked as bewitching as she was. He tried to speak, but his lips couldn't frame the words that his mind ordered. In a strained awkwardness the two drew nearer till but a few feet separated them.

"Zeb, how are you?" she broke the silence. "I saw your mother yesterday. She's terribly lonesome and feels bad about your leaving, but says for you to stay. She is awfully grateful about the money and told me she was hiding it from your father."

Her voice sounded queer when she mentioned his father.

"Pap," Zeb began, "what's he doing?"

She hesitated, glanced around as though to see if any one were near, and said: "Oh, Zeb, I'm so sorry for your poor mother and sisters. Your father is stilling with Pink Case—making moonshine up on Bear Run. And there's several strangers around here to-day. They say they're revenue officers. There will be trouble, I'm afraid."

"Well, if pap ain't got no more sense than to be kotched by the revenoors, hit's jest his hard luck. Itchy-Witchy, kin I ask ye to go up thar agin and tell maw not to be a frettin', caise I'm making a heap o' money now and I'll take keer o' her?"

"Yes, Zeb, I'll take your message."

"I'll be yere to-morrow," said Zeb. "Will ye be yere and let me know how things air then?"

Itchy-Witchy hesitated, and looking into Zeb's troubled face, she smiled slowly.

"Don't worry, Zeb," she said. "Everything will turn out all right. Sure enough, I'll see you here to-morrow when the local comes in."

She made a movement as though to put

out her hand. Zeb reached out and clasped her hand, soft, warm and yielding in his hard, calloused palm. A swift glance as each met the other's eyes, tense and blinding, passed between the two.

At the whistle blow from the engine ahead—"So long, Itchy-Witchy," and "Bye, bye, Zeb," the two parted, Zeb to run ahead to where the engine was slowly getting into motion, while the girl climbed up to the bank, and with a wistful, far away expression in her eyes, watched each passing car as the train moved by.

The last car was lost in the curve of the bend, the whistle calls sounded fainter and fainter. The inbound passenger rumbled in, stopped, started and disappeared, and still the girl sat, chin in hands, on the edge of the cut, her eyes resting on the shining rails not seeing the steel and cross ties, but an earnest black-haired mountain youth who so strangely affected her every time she met him.

The local turned around on the Y. Zeb ate his lunch that the call boy had got up for him that morning. Cold, clammy fried eggs, a greasy pork chop, a heavy, indigestible wedge of pie that tasted strong of cottonseed oil, followed by a wormy apple. Yet, though he was hungry, he ate mechanically, not tasting the food, for his mind was on Itchy-Witchy. And he remembered her voice, soft, low, quiet, so unlike the nasal tones of his womenfolk. He again thrilled at the grip of her hand. He never before knew how much a hand clasp could tell.

His thoughts were scattered by the engineer coming back from the shanty where he had gone to eat his lunch.

"All right, let's go," he ordered, jerking the throttle open.

Zeb tossed the empty, grease-stained paper lunch bag out the window, stepped down, grasped the shovel and flung in a few scoops of coal. The local started on its return trip, and in a short while squealed around the curve into Ecclefechan.

The engineer shouted across: "Thank the Lord we don't have to stop here!" And Zeb hearing these words, fervently wished they did.

The train gathered speed, and even with

the depot, Zeb looked out. There, in the same place he had last seen her, sat the girl. Three quarters of an hour had gone by, yet she had not moved.

Zeb jumped across the cab, stood in the right hand gangway and when the engine came abreast of her, he waved his hand. She looked up. Her face lighted in recognition. He saw her lips frame the word "Hello," and waving vigorously, he watched her till the bulge of the box cars swinging around the curve hid her from view.

The engineer cast a roguish eye down at him.

Grinning, he said: "Kid, I sure admire your choice. That's the best looking girl I've had a chance to rest my eyes on for many a long day. Where did you head into her?"

Zeb, his feet braced, one hand on the shovel handle, the other on the fire door chain, glared at the other.

"Cap," he explained, "I ain't never headed into her. I've knowed her always."

The hard note in Zeb's tone wiped the grin from the engineer's face and he turned quickly and glanced ahead. Zeb finished the salvo of scoops and climbed up on his seat. He was torn and buffeted by a dozen mixed emotions. He was proud of what the engineer had said of Itchy-Witchy, and yet piqued at his even mentioning her. There seemed to be something too fine about her that the railroad and the people who worked on it could not understand. They were of one world, she of another. The gap between the two was a wide one. He wondered if he would ever be where he could consider himself her equal. She spoke a different language, said "there," not "thar," "here," not "yere." There was a poise about her, a friendly aloofness that told of good breeding.

As the local ran its interrupted course back over the road, Zeb, between spells of firing, sat on his seat box and thought deeply. He would watch his words; he, too, would learn to talk like the "furnishers." There were books that told the way, not only how to railroad, but to do other things. He would find the time to read the books.

He little knew that events were working, fate was piling up the sum of eventualities so that out of a great hurt to himself, would come a greater good.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERILS OF THE RAIL.

ON a modern railroad, the powerful locomotives can haul trains far faster than the roadbed or equipment will allow. The demand is not so much for speed as for quick starting and rapid stops. A fast passenger engine can accelerate a train, build it up to such a speed that the distance it can be brought to a smooth stop is farther than the engineer can distinguish signals. Small wonder that many a train climbs the derail and leaves the rails. A little fog, a slight drizzle, in the danger period of uneven light between daylight and dark and the small margin of visibility is wiped out and smash—equipment and lives are destroyed.

Were it not for the air brake, twenty miles an hour would be a fast pace for a passenger and ten cars a long train for a freight. The air brake, one of the most potent and reliable of the mechanisms that the fertile mind of man ever conceived, marvelous as it is, has its weak points. From the pumps on the engine that compress the air, through the cooling coils into the reservoir that stores the latent energy, through the engineer's brake valve, down the train line across the gaps between the cars that are bridged by the flexible air hoses, there are a hundred points where trouble develops. For the air brake is as rugged as steel and brass and yet as delicately balanced as a leaf trembling in the wind.

A slight movement of the engineer's brake valve, a five-pound reduction of the train line pressure and simultaneously back over a hundred cars, the triple valves unbalance. The graduating slides move, and five pounds of air pressure drives from car drums on to the brake pistons. There is a movement of rods and levers, the brake beams carry the shoes against the wheels and as suddenly as a man snapping his fin-

gers, the brakes set. An intricate series of movements, instantaneous and powerful, a complicated marvel of balanced forces, push and pull, ebb and flow, extend and compress, a multitude of varying actions take place in the span of a breath.

A hundred men have racked their brains studying, experimenting, and perfecting the air brake. A corps of railroad mechanics are continually at work inspecting, adjusting, repairing it and yet in spite of their vigilance, often the brake, the very thing that means safety to a moving train, is the cause of violent smash-ups. At every terminal, the inspectors go over the brake mechanism, sounding with their hammers, setting the travel of the pistons, replacing the worn brake shoes, observing each part, examining and testing. Yet, although the company rules demand extreme care, the human element enters in and men who are paid to discover and repair defective brake mechanisms, sometimes let them slip by.

As the local pulled away from Ecclefechan, a break beam on the front tender truck swayed slowly back and forth with the motion of the train. It had swung through a small half inch arc for months with every movement of the tender. Little by little, the supporting links had worn, ground against each other till they became thinner and thinner. Each application of the brakes stretched the ductile iron a fraction, fined it down a few thousandths of an inch. Now, after months of wear, its safety factor was gone.

The engineer in his rounds had not noticed it. The brake inspectors at the roundhouse had passed it by. Just two links, worn thin, bearing hard and bright against each other. They were harmless looking, yet they contained more power for destruction than a hundred pounds of dynamite.

Four miles out of Ecclefechan the tracks crossed Bear Run on a low trestle, just an insignificant mountain stream rushing helter skelter in a foaming sheet of white water over the granite rocks that formed its bed. The local rounded a curve, coasted down the grade toward Bear Run. Just as the engine got on to the trestle, the engineer applied the brakes.

Then, without warning, with a clattering, smashing roar, it happened. It was inconceivable—as though the movement of the stubby brass brake valve handle had loosened an avalanche. The weak links parted, the steel brake beam dropped before the rolling tender truck wheels. They struck it, hopped up and came down clear of the rails.

The tender sagged to the left, and Zeb, astonished, wide-eyed, startled, heard the word—"Jump!"

Instinctively, the engineer had slammed the valve into the emergency notch and vaulted through the window of the cab. Zeb had no recollection of moving till half way out of the narrow gangway when he felt a sickening, lurching swing and he lost consciousness.

In a few minutes the cold rush of running water brought him to his senses again. He was lying face upward in the creek, the water bubbling and gurgling in his ears. When he tried to move, he found one foot held solid as though in a vise.

He opened his eyes and before him the black mass of the engine loomed, steam in a cloud roaring upwards hiding everything in a wet, impenetrable mist that slowly floated away. As it cleared, he was able to perceive his predicament. The engine had jumped the trestle and was lying on its side in the creek. His leg was caught, pinned between the cab and tender. Smashed, he thought to himself, although he felt no pain, just a dull numbness that extended far above his knee.

He lay on the upper side of the trestle and he realized that the engine had turned over one way while the jumble of broken beam and siding, he saw through the bridge timbers, showed him that the box cars had gone over the other way.

He looked at the splintered débris, and was thankful that he was not under it. Then he shuddered, for he remembered Johnny Deering had leaped out on that side. There was no sign of him now. He must be under the wreckage, killed or badly hurt.

Zeb raised his voice in a shout. An answering medley of cries drew nearer.

"Are you hurt?" the anxious question

came, followed by splashes in the water. Behind him he felt hands under his back lifting him up.

A groan of agony.

"Don't," moaned Zeb.

The leg pained when they moved his body. "I'm kotched, but never mind me. Git him," pointing across to the wreckage. "He's over thar."

While a brakeman held Zeb with a knee under his back, the others, led by the conductor, clambered among the smashed cars for a sign of the engineer. But search as they would, they could see nothing. Only a little smear of red that flowed out from under the high piled débris of twisted wreckage told where Johnny Deering lay. No sound came out, no movement stirred except that of the water gurgling through the jam that almost blocked the stream.

A few short moments before, a man, alert, quick to pain, had lived and by the movements of his muscles, controlled the thousand tons of motion in a moving string of cars behind him. Now he lay, a sodden mass, forever stilled under the wreck of his own train. He had met the end of many another railroader, struck down between heart beats, the breath buffeted suddenly from his body by the beating wings of death that ever swish along the right of way like the soft rush of the owl that flies at dusk.

But Zeb did not know Johnny Deering was gone. He was too immersed in his own troubles. It was indeed serious to be pinned by the foot, helpless, impotent, like a bear in a steel trap. He lay on the seat cushions a brakeman had propped under his back, in a daze, overwhelmed by the tragedy he had just witnessed. This was the second wreck he had seen. The first was far off like a view of a storm sweeping through the valley seen from a sunlit mountain top. This was close, terrifying by its nearness, numbing by its violence, like lightning striking the very tree he sheltered under, leaving a stunned, unreal aftermath.

The brakeman's voice was speaking as from a long distance in jerky, incomplete sentences: "All right, kid. Big hook's on the way. Wrecking crew soon be here—how you feel?—get you clear in a little—relief train a coming. Feel all right?"

Zeb lay unspeaking. He seemed to be floating, drifting down easily and gently on the stream that rippled cold across his chest. For half an hour he lay there, dreaming of his home, of the railroad that seemed far away, and of Itchy-Witchy, whom he felt near by within arm's length, observing him with deep concern in her face.

Into his mind crept the regret, momentary, fleeting—wish he had stayed home—wish he had not gone to the railroad. But it was instantly pushed away, for he knew that if he had not gone railroading, Itchy-Witchy would probably never have had any interest in him.

His thoughts stopped with a jerk. The water was rising on him. Slowly, so slowly, that no one had yet noticed it, the creek imperceptibly had crept up half an inch.

He opened his eyes, stared down stream through the trestle timbers at the high clutter of twisted rods, upturned trucks and broken wood that lay in the stream below where the cars had pitched down and were smashed out of all semblance of shape against the rocks of the creek. Immediately he understood. Many a time he had woven a fish trap of loosely bound branches and dammed a stream. The rushing water carrying sand and twigs, gravel and leaves, would soon fill the cracks and crevices and the creek would rise, impounding a little pool above the obstruction.

That was what was happening now. The rush of the water was carrying the spilled coal that slid out of the tender down on to the wreckage below. Little by little, the coal was filling up the openings and inch by inch the water was rising. He could feel the chill line moving upwards on him. Inexorable as the flooding tide, as certain as time, the water crept upwards.

He glanced at the yellow gilt letters on the tender with its back cocked upward toward the bank. The water line was up to the bar on an "R." Even as he looked, the parallel line vanished. The heavy thud of an ax beat dully on his ears. Someone was cutting at the timbers that blocked the stream. Rapid, *chop-chop-chop*, the blows rang out as though in a frantic endeavor to make a path for the water.

Zeb knew that their efforts were useless. That pile of packed, nail-filled wood and snarled iron was interlocked, woven into a homogeneous tangle that would take hours to tear apart. There was but one hope. His one chance for life lay in the arrival of the wrecking crew. The "big hook," with its swinging crane, its dozen levers, its coils of steel cable, with steam and dynamite, might clear the stream and stop the rising water. The puny strength of these frantic men who pulled and cut, jerked and hauled, was futile.

The erratic rasp of hurried sawing, a bedlam of shouts and orders, the blows as a sledge rang solid against tough, resisting iron and—the creek rose another inch.

A brakeman was talking to Zeb, assuring and reassuring him.

"You're O.K., old head. The wrecking crew 'ull be here in an hour. Just got the message they're half way here now. They're clearing the stuff away fast. How you feel?"

"Oh, all right," answered Zeb wearily.

Then fixing his sight on the tender, he saw his marks were submerged. The gilt letters on the black sides were gone, covered by the water. He closed his eyes.

"Tell them over thar, they needn't be a pullin' and a cuttin' at that air stuff. Thar's only one chanst fer me. The wrecker."

The water bubbled under his chin now. A group of men raised him up a few inches higher till the strain on his leg was heart breaking, so intense was the pain.

Zeb let out a groan. He heard voices from behind. Turning for the first time, he noticed a crowd of people lining the bank, watching, morbidly curious as he lay helpless while the water crept up—up. Stretch his tired neck as much as he would, it was chin high now. The crowd agape on the bank, himself lying helpless before them, reminded him of a chicken with a twisted neck, flopping out its last movements on the ground of the barnyard while the rest of the flock stood around in an amazed circle, watching its involuntary antics.

For a brief second a panic, nerve shattering, wild and unreasoning, gripped him. He threw back his head, his one idea to scream.

Then his eyes swept the crowd and he saw Itchy-Witchy. Even as his throat muscles tightened, his eyes impinged the picture of her blue dress, her yellow hair, her red cheeks when he last had seen her. Now her face was white, tears coursed down her cheeks, and Zeb knew that even as he suffered, she was suffering too.

The scream was choked still born on his lips and calmly, stoically, he waited. There was but two things possible now, he thought. Either the "big hook" must arrive or—he refused to think of the alternative.

A groan sounded from the watchers above. Zeb anxiously turned around. Waist deep in the water, the conductor of the local approached. White faced, grim like a man who dreaded a necessarily painful task, he waded towards Zeb, a shining saw in his hand.

"Well, kid, now don't you worry," Willie Mac addressed him. "I'm not the guy to see a fellow drown like a cat in a sack before my very eyes. If the rest of 'em ain't got the nerve, I guess I have. I'll fix you up so as you can get out. It'll be easy. You won't notice it at all. Just a couple of swipes with this saw and up you come. You'll be walking around in a month."

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"Whooot-whooot-who-who!" the call of engine whistle floated down.

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"She's almost here!" and Zeb, for the first time in his life, fainted dead away.

With a solid plume of live steam roaring twenty feet straight upwards from both pops, the exhaust pounding the air with a flailing bellow and a cloud of black smoke trailing in her wake, the wrecking train pounded the rails with her engine behind, her spinning drivers a blur, her side rods shuttling up the grades, scarce slowing a turn, sweeping around the curves and

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charging down the slopes. The "big hook" bobbed in front, a long necked antediluvian monster, rushing forward at a mad pace.

An hour and a half had passed since that imperative call flashed over the wires. The crew as one man had quickly taken their stations, a big passenger engine like magic rolled up behind, and in less than ten minutes the wrecker was under way.

A railroad may be run slipshod, haphazard, the roadbed a long series of rotten cross ties and worn out steel, the engine scarce able to haul the trains, the shop force disorganized, malingering, yet if there is one spark of the spirit of railroading left, the wrecking crew are alert, their tools and equipment in order, a fire laid ready for the match in the derrick boiler. For the delay of a minute in running the wrecker may mean a life and the passing of a short half hour bring a score of deaths.

Like a well trained life saving crew, the wrecking gang were prepared, and when Bear Run came into view there was not a second lost. Scarce had the noise of the exhaust quieted and the grating of the brake shoes as they dragged the cars to a stop were still whining, iron against steel, when the wrecking boss jumped clear of the moving car and, followed by half of his gang, ran forward.

Out on the broken trestle he rushed, took in the situation with practised eye, and called to one of his men—"Two sticks!"

The conductor shouted: "Hey, the engineer's under there!"

The wrecking foreman gazed down at the wreckage, then across to Zeb, whose head was barely above the water.

"How bad is he hurt?" he roared, his voice rising loud above the rumble of the water.

"Oh, not bad. Just caught between cab and tender."

"And Johnny?" the wrecker questioned.

Sorrowfully Willie Mac shook his head toward the jumble below.

"We haven't seen a sign of him."

The other nodded understandingly, and taking the sticks of dynamite that were brought to him he climbed down and, reach-

ing arm's length into the wreck, he pulled out the long fuse, brushed the ash off his stub of a cigar, and holding the glowing end to the white, ropelike fuse, he waited till a sputter and a trail of smoke proved it was alight. He had made a quick decision. There was a chance of saving Zeb, none for the engineer.

With a sweeping motion of his arm, he shouted: "Stand back!" to the crowd on the bank and calmly he stepped on to the trestle and, walking back a dozen feet, waited.

A minute, a minute and a half, a tense, strained breathless space that seemed like a long time. A thump shook the ground, a whamm reverberated. Trucks turned over, the middle of the pile lifted up a foot or two, splinters flew high from it, and in a circling, eddying race, a matted raft of broken timber rushed down stream on the crest of a wall of water. The dynamite had quickly broken down the dam. The creek subsided, Zeb's shoulders appeared above water, then his waist, and finally he emerged sitting on a sodden seat box cover, his left leg stiff in front of him, caught half way between knee and ankle in the space of the gangway now a mere two inch slit between engine and tank.

At an order a couple of men were down beside Zeb almost before the water subsided. An hydraulic jack was wedged in place between engine and tender. There came a rapid *click-click* as they swayed the handle back and forth. The tender gave a fraction under the enormous pressure, moved, and slid back a few inches. A dozen eager hands supported Zeb's limp, unconscious form up the bank and into a waiting car.

The engine was uncoupled, and with one car behind it started its swift sprint back towards the terminal, while the conductor of the wrecker examined Zeb's leg and, shaking his head sadly, said: "Not a chance in a thousand to save it. Bet a dollar it will have to come off at the knee. I've seen too many guys nipped before. They always saw them off as soon as they get them to the hospital if they're hurt at all bad."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Crooks Welcome

By WALTER A. SINCLAIR

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

HERE was an open invitation to crooks, and Monty Craig grinned happily as he read the newspaper stories. Not that Monty was a crook. Quite the opposite. He was the extender of the open invitation which now shouted itself from the printed page.

It was not an advertisement headed "To All Crooks in Good Standing to Whom These Presents Come, Greeting"; because the presents had not come to them yet, but merely were dangled tantalizingly in prospect. Nor was it rounded off with "R. S. V. P." Nevertheless, it was calculated to make a crookish mouth water.

A news story it was, headed, "Dollars To Go at Cut Rate," with subheads drolly announcing a marked down sale of Uncle Sam's slightly soiled currency.

The account, written in a light vein, stated that Montgomery Craig 2d, who had been cut off in the will of the late millionaire manufacturer with a paltry ten thousand dollars, would take physical possession of his inheritance this afternoon. Furthermore, that he had stipulated that this sum be paid him in one-dollar bills, which he would proceed forthwith to sell to the public at the cut price of ninety-nine cents a dollar. Each purchaser could buy one dollar, no more.

This "latest outburst of Monty Craig, whose escapades have added to the joy of nations"—to quote the news account—came opportunely in dog days when serious news is scarce and freak stories are played up. Following the interviews with Monty was an extended "shirt-tail," which is

newspaperese for condensed addenda written from biographical department clippings to refresh the readers' memories on what the latest development is all about. This shirt-tail recalled Monty's previous antics to distress his family.

"I'd like to see Temple when he reads this," mused Monty. "His solemn old map will look as if the League of Nations had changed it."

Temple Craig was Monty's brother, the dutiful son who had stayed at the right hand of Montgomery Craig, Sr., and had made sure that the overstuffed veal was not apportioned to the sunny prodigal.

Temple was everything that Monty was not. Solemn, industrious, and dull, Temple had permitted his father to cast him into a rigid mold, while Monty was running wild. Timidly Temple had submitted to the domineering of Craig while Monty had revolted openly.

Temple had been groomed to take his father's place as head of the business, while Monty refused to sue for reconciliation. Temple had toadied and schemed to get everything, while Monty had continued to do things which enraged their father and fixed him in his determination to cut off his namesake.

All of Craig's favoritism had dated from their college days when Monty, then in his freshman year, had taken the blame for an escapade in which Temple became involved within a few months of graduation. A telephoned tip that the culprit's name was "Craig" naturally brought the charge to the door of Monty, who in his one undergraduate year had made a record as a practical joker and prank originator. Temple, in his secretive way, had stepped out for once in his college career and through sheer inexperience had tripped immediately.

Monty was expelled, and his father had disowned him. Monty had countered by joining a burlesque troupe which advertised "the millionaire comedian, son of Montgomery Craig, the millionaire manufacturer." The elder Craig had doubled the disinheritance in a public interview which furnished the wily theatrical man the publicity he aimed to get.

As a stage recruit Monty only lasted the season out. He would not rehearse and he broke up the show repeatedly by rattling the other principals with improvised gags in place of their correct cues.

His drawing power also waned as soon as the public forgot his case. For several years he had roamed America on walking tours that he called tramping, although he punctuated it by working in various places. Life in the open called him. It was good for his physique, which was not robust.

One season he traveled with tent shows, making a hit as ballyhoo with his fund of quick wit. Winter found him back on Broadway, serving as press agent for various shows. There he could be near Ruth Lowrey.

Monty had discovered Ruth playing all sorts of feminine rôles in a tent show stock company. She never had been east of the Mississippi when he brought her to public notice. The tent show had pitched at a Western town which had captured a big prize fight. This sporting event had brought Broadway to the sticks, and with it a number of feature writers and theatrical commentators. Monty knew a few, and through these he won the acquaintance of the others during the dull days preceding the big bout.

He steered these influential critics around to see Ruth. She was something to write about when material was scarce. Ruth's name went over the wires N.P.R. to the big town on the Hudson. An engagement on the strength of this publicity followed. Ruth made good in a small rôle.

While she was reaching for her laurels and while his own dole at the bay window was modest, Monty had contented himself with being her helpful friend. When the elder Craig died, Monty had moved into a rather pretentious apartment. He could not afford it, but he talked a sporting acquaintance into gambling on his chances in the division of the Craig millions.

This man was to receive back a juicy bonus together with what he spent in setting Monty up in style, after the will was opened. And when the document was read, it was found to cut off Monty with the nominal sum of ten thousand dollars. In

case he contested, he was to lose even this.

After cheerfully imparting this news to Ruth, Monty asked her impulsively when she was going to marry him. They were seated in her pretty little apartment, discussing this and that. Ruth had just concluded a successful season, with bigger prospects for the fall opening. It was no secret that she liked Monty, and was deeply grateful for his efforts in obtaining her a metropolitan hearing. But, marry?

"Never, while you remain a trifler," she told him. "You are aimless, drifting. You have such possibilities, Monty, and you're just frittering them away. You could go so far, yet you haven't ambition enough to make your own way. You won't fight—you just turn off everything as a joke. You bear a well known name; your father did things. He started with nothing and built up a fortune—"

"I'm not interested in retiring money from circulation," objected Monty, good-naturedly. "I could have returned some of that jack to normalcy."

"No matter what he did to you, your father did a lot of good with his money," persisted Ruth. "He gave employment to hundreds of men. And he gave liberally to good causes. He was well known. You are a blank as far as making an honored name goes. Do something that will make a name for yourself. You never had your name in the papers in connection with one useful or helpful project. You never benefited your fellow man—present company excepted—one cent's worth—"

"Stop the presses!" commanded Monty, rising a bit haughtily. "Before the week's out my name and picture will be in all papers as a wholesale benefactor. I'll do exactly what you suggest, on a large scale. I'll benefit ten thousand fellow men just one cent's worth per each."

II.

RUTH had to laugh in spite of herself at the literal way in which Monty had taken up her challenge so promptly. She, too, rose, and extended a hand in speeding him on to his large and ludicrous task.

A pretty picture she made as she dismissed him. Her modish attire was a sharp contrast to the home-made frock she had worn when Monty had discovered her playing in the tent show, but the girl had remained the same.

Slender and graceful, wiry and vivid with abundant health and vivacity. Some of the tan acquired while living in the open still adhered. Her hair was dark brown and bobbed, her eyes were hazel, and her nose had an alert tilt. From her piquant chin swept a sweet line of throat.

She was as tall as Monty, and her hand-clasp matched his in strength. While not frail, he never had specialized in muscular development. He was the New Yorker born, trim and not bulky, healthy enough for ordinary purposes, but no bigot about physical exercise. His green eyes had a merry, mocking light in them, and his knowing mouth usually was spread in a cheerful grin.

It would be a pleasure to describe him as broad-shouldered and masterful, but truth dictates that Monty be set down as average in size and appearance. His fists were negligible as weapons, but he packed a devastating vocabulary and a hair-trigger wit.

When it came to assurance, he could brush aside a head waiter and appropriate a table marked "Reserved" without acting self-conscious. He had sassied back traffic cops and got away with it. Hard-boiled city editors utterly wasted their impersonations of ennui when Monty was talking pictures into their papers.

Having made his boast to Ruth, he went about his preparations with characteristic promptness. He telephoned to Peck, the lawyer for Temple, who was the executor, and demanded that he be paid his ten thousand dollars on the following day. In consideration he would sign a waiver to all claims to the estate. If refused, he would contest the will.

Darius Peck tried to fence, but Monty was peremptory. As Temple was in his lawyer's office at the moment, Peck advised him that Monty's proposal would clear away all possibility of a contest.

Mr. Craig had been a widower, and he had bequeathed all but Monty's ten thou-

sand dollars to Temple. The latter could meet his brother's terms easily. Monty followed up their assent by demanding that the money be awaiting him in one-dollar bills the following afternoon at two thirty. When Peck sputtered about the absurdity of the stipulation, Monty curtly announced that refusal to comply would lead to a will contest. Then he hung up.

Reporters for afternoon newspapers were summoned to hear Monty's announcement. Purposely he delayed until it was too late for that day's paper, giving them the story to be released simultaneously the following noon. And now it was *the* day. Evening papers carried the story conspicuously. The scribes had probed vainly to uncover any commercial scheme camouflaged by his innocent desire to sell one-dollar bills for ninety-nine cents.

"You all remember the famous story of the man who sat on London Bridge trying to sell pound gold pieces at a reduction—and no takers," Monty reminded them. "I'm trying to prove that New Yorkers aren't so skeptical and dumb, and that they know a bargain when it's offered. I'm going to get this ten grand in ones, take it from Lawyer Darius Peck's office up to a vacant lot on Washington Heights—there's just one left—and sell 'em. As my little tribute to the generosity of the man whose name I bear, and whose concern—Montgomery Craig Pump Company—makes the best pumps on the market. I'll be at Peck's at two thirty, and hope to start the sale at three thirty. Follow the red van. No repeaters allowed. Sale limited to one dollar to a person, as I want to benefit ten thousand persons one cent's worth. This should appeal especially to the bargain hunting sex. When I've sold the ten thousandth dollar I'll consider having follow up sales, selling the nine thousand nine hundred dollars I take in, and so on until it's all sold."

Several of the more industrious reporters with mathematical bents had embellished their stories with boxes showing how many persons could buy a dollar for ninety-nine cents if Monty continued reselling until he had reached the ultimate one-spot. As they were better humorists than mathematicians, no two accounts agreed.

All papers carried pictures of Monty Craig, the jazz philanthropist. He had not let the morning sheets in on this advance release, because they would have the actual story of the sale all to themselves hours ahead of the evening editions. Monty knew how to divide it to satisfy all. Hence his grin of satisfaction as he read.

His apartment doorbell rang. Monty admitted a man in chauffeur's livery who assumed a wooden posture.

"The car awaits," announced this person stiffly.

"Sir," corrected Monty meaningly.

"Awaits, sir," amended the chauffeur, adding: "You little shrimp! If you'd tried to pull that on me when we was trouping, Monty, I'd 'a' crowned you with a tent stake—sir."

"I would remind you, Perry, that you are about to chauff' for a personage," admonished Monty, reaching for a glistening top hat. "Is the royal announcer and marine band awaiting, my good man?"

"He is, bozo—and that 'good man' stuff would mark the commencement of the tragedy if I hadn't known you for a good guy," retorted this astounding menial.

Perry Jones was another free soul, a tent show driver with whom Monty had shared tobacco on the box and beside many camp fires while exchanging verbal volleys or swapping yarns. Perry had dropped in on Monty early that week after driving into New York on an errand which had had considerable to do with the plans hastily made for the bizarre project upon which they were venturing.

"Lead on, then, good varlet," commanded Monty, "and proclaim our rare virtues and lofty entitlements to such of the populace as may attend our progress."

Magnificently he trod, waving a lordly cane as Perry preceded him to the sidewalk. At the curb stood a shining big circus ticket van, painted a lively red and gold. Perry had driven it to New York to have an artist furbish its sides anew with panels featuring lions, tigers and other kindred of the wild, all hungry and demanding service.

An ideal vehicle from which to sell dollars, Monty had induced Perry to let him

use this elegant motor for the great green-back sale. Adorning its sides and partly covering the vivid nature studies were banners announcing that Montgomery Craig 2d would dispense ten thousand dollars in denomination of one dollar at the unprecedented rate of ninety-nine cents each, one to a purchaser, this day, follow the van.

While Perry mounted the inclosed driving seat, Monty entered through the rear door of the regal ticket van. Once inside, he opened the ticket window built in the door, and leaned far out on the sill after the manner of Barbara Frietchie or Juliet Capulet. Here he doffed his silk hat grandly to the apathetic group on the sidewalk.

At a word from Perry James, a violently red coupé led off, dragging an equally vivid crimson trailer which immediately went into noisy eruption. Asthmatic whoops and grunts which burst forth from it gradually took form as popular musical selections interpreted by a baby grand calliope which tooted when its tires revolved.

With this musical volcano leading the way, the gaudy ticket van followed. From its rear window Monty bowed and hat-waved as industriously as a President. His green eyes were lively with pleasurable anticipation. For, from his observation post, he had seen two men jump into two different taxicabs after motioning for two different chauffeurs to trail him. And each taxi already had passengers before these men jumped in. Farther back, a roadster appeared to persist in following, also.

Something interesting was in prospect.

III.

WHEN they had tooted their way down town to the building where Lawyer Peck had his office, Monty dismissed the vociferous escort. He stepped out of his steel van and bowed for the news reel and still camera photographers. To these and to the reporters who were waiting to cover his arrival Monty confided the location of the uptown lot where he intended to stage his sale. At his suggestion that the real story would be up there, these harvester of printed and pictured news hurried off to be ready for him.

Ascending in the one creaky elevator which served the dingy old building, he entered the office of Peck & Son. Darius Peck, who was Son and sole surviving member of the firm, was a rusty, dusty old-school gentleman who plastered a side lock of iron gray hair over an otherwise barren scalp, and thereby deceived himself if no one else. He had handled Montgomery Craig's first legal business thirty-five years ago and had remained the late millionaire's attorney to the last. Peck was very conservative, and wore old style gold-rimmed eyeglasses on a heavy black ribbon looped around his neck. At that, he was a good lawyer.

He received Monty with due solemnity, and ushered him into an inner office. There sat Temple Craig and a heavy-set man with square-toed shoes, and the gray uniform of a bank special policeman. Between the square toes reposed a suit case which matched the one Monty had brought.

"Ah, the winning candidate, I believe," greeted Monty at sight of his brother. His tone was bantering and not unfriendly. Still it annoyed Temple. The brothers stared at each other, Monty interestedly, Temple a bit stiffly and also furtively. This elder son was thirty, and looked easily ten years older. His skin and hair had the same dry appearance which characterized the much-older Mr. Peck. In fact, Temple's hair had thinned to the vanishing point over his bulbous brow which was etched with lines and puckers. Temple, too, had the big Craig nose, and a long, thin jaw.

"Ah, Montgomery," he managed to bark in a nervous voice. After wiping a pair of shell-rimmed glasses he adjusted them and peered at his brother as though at some curious specimen. Monty promptly whipped out a similar pair, clapped them on and stared back. Thus these brothers faced each other for the first time in five years.

Both Temple and Mr. Peck were conservative to the extent of never as a rule looking at an evening newspaper before night. On this occasion, however, somebody in Peck's office had brought afternoon papers to them a half hour before the interview. Both were still stunned.

"Loving greetings," commented Monty mockingly. He was four years Temple's junior, and did not look his years. "The prodigal has returned, but I fail to see you run to fall on my neck."

"Hardly," articulated Temple uncomfortably. "Regardless of how I may feel, father's wishes must be carried out."

"It must wrench your tender heart terribly to hand yourself everything but my imposing heritage," grinned Monty. "Well, let's have the agony over. Trot out the dotted line and the jack. Have you got it as I ordered—in ones?"

"Yes, but see here," expostulated Temple, putting on his lofty chapeau manner, "I must protest at this crazy stunt for making a fool of yourself and bringing notoriety on our name—"

"All right. No ten thousand aces, no waiver," snapped Monty. "As for bringing notoriety on our sacred name, I know where I can untag a man who would—but for my keeping him quiet—broadcast an interesting earful about what he remembers when he was a bartender in New Ha—"

"All right, all right," hastily interrupted Temple. "Peck, would you and the officer kindly step out and leave us alone a few minutes?"

The lawyer and the policeman withdrew after Monty had signed the waiver and a receipt for the ten thousand dollars.

"It won't do you any good trying to drag up that old matter," began Temple when the brothers were left together. "Nobody would believe you, what with your wild reputation."

"If I was that kind of brother, I would have uncorked the truth five years ago," retorted Monty. "Our family should have at least one son who will stand by in a pinch and not cry out, even if his head is bloody but unbowed. I merely reminded you when you tried to ritz me."

"You were heading for expulsion, anyway, so it didn't mean anything to you, whereas I had almost reached graduation," muttered Temple. "I tried to tell father, but never quite got his attention."

"You got his money, which was more to the point," Monty reminded him, packing his bales of money into his suit case.

"I didn't mind your playing up to him and cutting me while he was—here. But since he has gone, you never have invited me to come back to live in the old home. That hurt, Temple. So this money is going to talk and to call attention to your brotherly love. Even you can understand what I mean."

"Can't we settle this?" asked Temple, anxiously.

"Only when you do the square thing. Good-by," replied his brother, locking his grip and carrying it out. Pausing in the doorway, he added: "You'll know where to find me if you want me. All newspapers will have stuff about us for the next few days at least."

Mr. Peck bowed him out. The special cop had been sent on his way, once the money had been delivered. Monty stepped into the corridor, alert for the commencement of something he sensed.

The first door across the hallway on the gloomy way to the elevator was ajar. Through the opening could be seen two men standing in an unfurnished office, apparently looking it over with a view to renting. They discussed the needed repairs.

From the direction of the elevator came a young woman, strikingly attired in an ensemble costume and summer furs. She had black hair and snapping black eyes which darted a beseeching glance at Monty. This entreating glance was reënforced by a strained smile. The custodian of the money bag stared right through her, with no answering expression.

Suddenly the girl swayed, pressing one hand to her forehead while the other hand groped feebly against the corridor wall for support. She staggered on a pace, then gently slumped to the floor just outside the opened door, incidentally blocking Monty Craig's path.

Although the young woman's collapse was done so quietly that it attracted no attention of the regular tenants, it did not go unnoticed by the two prospective renters in the vacant office. Uttering subdued, distressed sounds, they rushed out to the side of the girl. Both were robust enough looking, but they appeared unable to lift her unaided.

"This lady has fainted," announced one kneeling stranger, addressing Monty. "If you will lend a hand, sir, we can carry her into this office and revive her. The agent was just showing us through when he was called downstairs. Just take one shoulder."

Monty did so, using one hand while the other retained its hold on his treasure bag. This he set down, however, when he used both hands to help settle the girl in a broken old chair found in the office.

"If you could get a glass of water," suggested the man who had spoken first. "You may be a tenant, or know some one who is."

"She doesn't need it," replied Monty. "She's done her stuff."

"Beat it, Belle," snapped the other man, noting Monty's undeceived expression. He and his man companion whipped out pistols and stepped between Monty and the door, which shut after the woman as she skipped out. With a ferocious scowl the spokesman warned:

"Not a sound out of you now, or we'll drill you. Stick 'em up."

IV.

THE two men held their weapons in a careless, familiar manner, and favored Monty with an assortment of hard looks. One man was pear-shaped as to head and body, having a flabby red face which had been misused by dissipation and human fists. His red nose had been inflated by drink and spread by some unfriendly blow. He wore a Panama and a loosely-fitting gray suit.

His companion was tall, sunken-cheeked, and furrowed up with heavy black eyebrows and a mustache not much bigger. He had a hawk-like nose from the base of which several sets of deeply-etched lines put parentheses around his slit mouth. A motoring cap was pulled low over his craggy brows, and he wore a dark blue serge suit.

"If those things are loaded, be careful with them," ordered Monty, severely. "I like your act, but not well enough to pay anything for it if you go getting nervous in the forefinger."

"Don't you worry about us being nervous—that's your part," growled the fat bandit, uncertainly. "You're going to pay, all right."

"I suppose you think I'm toting the heavy sugar," jeered Craig. "Why, you poor saps! I've been waiting for you to pop up ever since you taxied after me from my house."

The two men exchanged fleeting, questioning glances.

"You don't suppose I'd carry that dough around in this suit case, do you?" demanded Monty pityingly. "That was only the decoy to focus your attention while my side kick slipped out with the real package. You crooks lack imagination. Your only advantage is the element of surprise and the fear that the word 'crook' carries. In this instance, there's no surprise. I've been waiting to see what new stuff you would pull—if any. As if a pair of morons like you—"

"Get funny, guy, and we'll bump you off," snarled the thin man.

"Now we've got you for robbery with intent to kill," exulted Monty as though vastly pleased. The two crooks hesitated, glancing uneasily around and at their intended victim who refused to scare.

"Make it worth a good stretch," urged Monty. "What do you suppose this was advertised so loudly for, excepting to attract you buzzards here where you can be nabbed? We could have nailed you when you showed up, but by catching you in the act of turning off this trick—Here, take the valise. They're waiting for you to walk out with it."

"Let's larn," urged the pudgy man in alarm, edging toward the door. "Either this is a trap or this bird is a nut. Larn out-a here quick—we been made a sucker of!"

"The grip," insisted the hawk-nosed man.

"Sure, take it," urged Monty, eagerly. Too eagerly to suit the plump crook, who motioned restrainingly to his pal.

"Don't touch it. It's a plant," he warned, backing toward the door. "Lay off it. Can't you see how anxious he is to get it on us? Larn while we can. And you,

boss, keep your beaver in this room for the next five minutes or we'll knock you off if we have to cook for it."

With that the pair backed out, after peering nervously into the hallway. Monty whistled the Rogue's March as they exited, which caused the hawk-beak to raise his gun threateningly. Only for an instant, though. Then caution and his stout pal prevailed.

The door closed behind the pair. Although they moved on rubber soles, Monty was certain that the men hastened away immediately, once they stepped out of the office. However, he was in no hurry to pursue them and was sitting on his upended suit case when the door was unlocked and swung slowly inward.

A bare-headed man who seemed annoyed, started in and paused, staring in surprise at Monty. The latter promptly exclaimed:

"You are the renting agent, and you're looking for two men who were looking at this suite. They sent you out on some wild goose chase."

"They asked me to go out and call in their partner, who would be waiting in a big maroon limousine," explained the renting agent, peevishly. "I couldn't find any such car or man. Are you the partner?"

"They did try to induce me to place my money in their hands," grinned Monty. "Next time they ask to see an office, tell 'em to apply for a suite at the Tombs."

"You mean they were crooks?" gasped the agent.

"They thought they were stick-up guys until I showed them they were all wrong," elucidated Monty.

At his request the agent guided him to the freight elevator on which he descended to a side door. This enabled Monty to return by a new route to his ticket van and to scrutinize any suspicious-appearing loiterers who might be watching the front entrance for his reappearance. He also avoided running into the pair who had tried to hold him up and who, after second thought, might have lingered in the hallway to try again.

Perry was not on the driver's seat. Possibly he had alighted to buy some smokes. The interior of the ticket van was the safest

place to be with that money, for in that crowd on the sidewalk a husky sneak thief might wrench away the suit case and run before Monty could talk him out of it. Circling the rear of the crowd without being observed, Monty slipped into the van and slammed the door which he had left ajar for a quick reentrance. The snaplock clicked and, with a sigh, he dropped his valuable piece of luggage.

"Now to get ten thousand pennies to make change for bargain hunters," he chuckled, gazing out of the ticket window for sign of Perry.

Behind him lay a folded canvas banner which usually was hung near the ticket window when the van was on tour. On this were piled two empty mail bags for the specie. Without warning, one of these bags was pulled over his head.

V.

A METALLIC ring—the snout of a pistol—was poked into the tender section of Monty's back at the same moment that the stout sack eclipsed his head and shoulders.

"Not a sound, if you don't want to be bumped off," spoke a new voice through the muffling canvas folds.

Monty was conscious of four hands—there must be at least two bandits inside of the van. They had slipped inside while all eyes were on the building entrance. Hidden beneath the canvas, they had awaited his return. Would they tie and leave him, or would they drive away with him, he wondered?

As if in answer to his unspoken question, the van started off, while his two captors dragged Monty back from the window and threw him on the floor. Could it be that Perry was in with this gang? Monty did not believe that. For Perry was a friend, even though he had not always been exactly a Sunday school boy.

"You needn't hope for help from your boob chauffeur," announced the man who had promised to shoot. "Oh, what a dumb-bell! I told him you had sent word for him to join you on the roof of that building and to hurry. He must have thought you were staging a battle up there,

the way he beat it. I was just able to catch up in time to lock the roof scuttle door behind him after he popped out. He's good for an hour up there."

"He's probably down now. Don't you know he's a human fly?" demanded Monty thickly through the bag. "Perry ballyhoos circuses by climbing high building fronts. That old structure would be child's play for him. You're the dumb-bells."

"You'll be an angel if you don't keep quiet," growled the man with the gun, jabbing his weapon meaningly against a particularly vulnerable spot. "This would be mistaken for the exhaust if you make me use it."

"All right. This isn't my funeral—I only came for the ride," rejoined Monty, trying to project an air of gayety through the canvas. "What's the idea of sending me parcel post? I'm enjoying this matinée too much to squawk. Especially when I think of the big wow finish, when the laugh is going to be on you."

"See here, Simple, this is no joke, y'understand," asserted a second new voice, and a hand roughly shoved Monty to emphasize the words.

"You don't see it?" chortled Monty. "Boy, this is going to make you the laughing hit of the town! Say, would you mind looking out the ticket window to see if there's a police flivver following? Should be."

Although he could not see them, Monty could hear one of the pair step hastily to the ticket window. He laughed aloud, for he had them swinging, he was sure.

"Naw, there ain't none following, so you might as well lay off that line," advised the man who had looked. To his accomplice he added querulously: "If you got that windbag tied now, put a muffler on him."

"I suppose they're following in an ordinary car," soliloquized Monty, cheerfully. "I guess they're biding their time."

"Can the bluff, feller," suggested the man with the pistol, again tapping it urgently against Monty to emphasize his orders. "If any one was following they wouldn't wait this long. You can't kid us, even if you are kidding yourself."

"You wouldn't take that little pleasure

away from me, would you?" asked the prisoner. "Of course, you're doing this in your own way, so you can't object to our doing our stuff in our own way, can you? Not unless you're amateurs. Is it possible that this is an amateurs' job?"

"Listen, sap. If we have to croak you, it won't be no amateur job," snarled the man behind the gun. "If you talk me into plunking you, it'll be your own fault—suicide. Now laugh that off."

"I always did want to meet up with some first class professional crook and killer," enthused Monty. "I'm to understand that you're a Grade A crook? I'd hate to deal with anything less. Are your killings always fatal?"

"Aw, this guy's a nut," burst forth the gunman in exasperation. "If I have to listen to him, I'll be one, too."

"Don't you dare call me crazy," raved Monty, playing up to this cue. "That's what those other yeggs upstairs said when they tried to hold me up. You aren't in with them, are you?"

"What's that?" exclaimed both captors. "Somebody else stick you up?"

"Sure. Two fellows up in that office building, just as I was starting out," Monty told them. "Stuck me up with guns."

"How come they didn't take your grip then?" demanded one of his captors incredulously.

"They did, but they put it down quickly when they found out what was in it," replied Monty with a wild laugh. He would have given considerable at that moment to see just what had been done with his satchel.

"What d'you mean, what was in it?" demanded the man with the ticklish gun. "We know. Ten thousand smackers."

"He-he! Took you in, too," babbled Monty, putting everything he had into the maniacal voice. "It was for my cursed brother. He put me in bad with my old man and had me cut off. He persecuted me and told lies about me. I fixed up that suit case for him. To blow him to kingdom come. I would have done it to-day, but there were some innocent people in there, a young girl and an office boy. So I told my brother what was in it and that

I was going to open it and blow us all up unless he did the right thing. So he divided evenly. Millions! Millions!"

"You got millions?" they asked eagerly.

"He gave me a check. I mailed it to myself there," giggled Monty foolishly.

The gunman gave a despairing wail.

"What did I tell you? A nut!" he mourned. "The whole thing looked like a nut's scheme from the start. This bird has gone cuckoo over his troubles, and we fell for it. Put that damn suit case on something soft."

"Aw, he may be faking to stall us," objected the other man.

"He's crazy as a loon, I tell you," cried the gunman. "Why, the whole business is crazy, can't you see? Don't you open that thing! He may be faking, but—safety first. You can open it, if you want to, but not now, not in this steel bus. If you guessed wrong, we'd be collected with a vacuum cleaner. Wait till we get to the —up there, and then you can soak it a while before opening the thing. Maybe you're right, but if you ain't we'll never know it, if you go opening it now."

"I'll open it for you—and we'll end our troubles," offered Monty, pawing around blindly behind himself with his bound hands.

"Stop it, or I'll feed you a steel pill," threatened the gunman with his usual metallic emphasis. "Chief, lemme croak this nut before he blows us all up. He's a white elephant to us now, and dangerous."

"You croak him and you'll follow him," warned the other. "Dead, he'd be worthless to us. As it is, we're going to cash in on him a good deal stronger than the ten grand he may or may not have. What do you suppose we're lugging him off for when we could have beat it?"

"Well, Mr. Bones, what are you simps carting me around for?" demanded Monty.

"We're going to hold you for ransom," announced the "chief."

VI.

"WHAT do you think I am, a golden-haired cheeild?" demanded Monty indignantly. "Don't you know that nothing

but golden-haired cheeilds are kidnaped for ransom?"

"You'll be the white-haired boy before we give you up," promised the man called chief. "What's ten thousand compared to what your brother will have to shell out to get you back?"

"My brother? Yow! That's rich," chorused Monty. "Why, he'd pay you to keep me. Be yourself!"

"Aw, tune out on him," muttered the bedeviled chief.

A moment later a rope was looped around Monty's head, and his jaws were forced open long enough to jam in the sacking which then was reënforced by the cord, making an effectual gag. This proved complete disarmament for the talkative prisoner and brought peace to his jailers.

"Why didn't we do that before?" grunted the chief. "He sure had me goofy with his gab."

"At that, it may have saved us from being blown sky-high," his companion reminded him uneasily. "I don't feel comfortable with a bug."

They rode in silence for half an hour longer. Then the red van halted, maneuvered and backed. A muffled rumbling rising from beneath the vehicle made Monty believe they were on a bridge or a pier. The two occupants of the van's interior got out and signaled the driver for backing.

"Right back to the deck house door, back away," ordered the chief. Then Monty knew they were on a pier or string-piece. He heard the man in charge address the driver as "Bat" and the gunman as "Paul" and "Marto." When the van had been backed to suit, the three men carried Monty from his steel prison.

"Take that bus up in the Bronx or somewhere and lose it," ordered the chief. "Then call up this number and give 'em our ultimatum. Hurry, now. When you get done, join us here or row out."

They locked the door of the room or compartment in which they had dumped Monty unceremoniously on the floor. He could feel a gentle rise and fall which betrayed that they were afloat. A lantern was lighted, and the chief spoke.

"Better take that bag off that goof before he smothers on us," he said. "We don't want him to die on our hands before we can cash in on him."

"Aw, he'll start talking us dizzy," complained the one called Paul. Nevertheless, he untied the gag and then removed the bag from the prisoner's head. While the men dragged him to a sitting position on a kitchen chair and locked a leg-iron around his ankle, Monty blinked owlishly in the sudden light.

Evidently he was in the cabin of some sort of craft. Its square and clumsy interior lines and complete lack of portholes suggested that it was a barge or canal boat. A certain amount of furnishing gave it the appearance of a crude houseboat with very low ceiling. There was a tiny window on either side, but these were covered by metal sheets fastened over the outer side.

Three bunks were arranged one above the other at one side or end of the cabin. Monty's leg chain was attached to the bunk stanchion. In the room were a deal table and a few chairs. The man pushed the table up to Monty. On it was writing paper.

"Here, you write as I dictate," commanded the leader, producing a fountain pen. To his companion he added: "Undo his hands, Paul. He can't write with 'em tied."

"Write as I tell you," repeated the chief, pushing his pen toward Monty, who took it and dropped it again. "Something like this: 'My dear Brother—'"

"If I addressed him that way, he'd never believe it was me, and would toss it into the waste basket," demurred Monty.

"Never mind. Do as I say," roared the kidnap leader. "Say: 'I am held for ransom. I do not know where. I am being used kindly. Pay fifty thousand dollars as instructed and I will be returned. Refuse and something will happen—' Say, why don't you write as I tell you?"

"How do I know you aren't fooling? About returning me, I mean," demanded Monty innocently. "Don't you know it's out of style to kidnap?"

"We'll 'style' you, if you don't kick through," snarled the man.

"See here. If you're regular kidnapers, show me your union cards in the kidnapers' union," demanded Monty. "I don't intend to have anything to do with a job that can be called off—"

"Listen, goof. No kidding now. We mean business," stormed the chief glowering.

At the moment he looked it, too. He was a middle-aged man with a dark, square face featuring a jutting, craggy chin and a fleshy nose. His eyes were dark and piercing under downdrawn, scowling brows. His stocky body was set off in a dark brown suit which revealed excellent tailoring.

His companion was a slim-waisted, patent-leather-haired young fellow with olive skin, fierce, black eyes and full lips, the lower of which had been scarred by a knife in some past affray.

"This doesn't look like business to me," objected Monty. "If you were real businesslike you'd draw up an agreement to deliver me where consigned on payment, C. O. D., or F. O. B., or something—"

"I'm going to swing on him if it costs me everything," announced Paul, rising ominously and balling a hairy fist.

"Wait!" commanded his leader sharply. "I can handle this comedian. Listen, my friend. We've wasted enough time on you. You may be nutty, but you get me all right. You write as I dictate or we will have to try a little persuasion—and you won't be able to laugh that off. This boy knows a few tricks of twisting arms. Or if you prefer, a red hot wire to touch you up. Ready now?"

"Sure. Don't get excited," rejoined Monty. "I'm just telling you that you don't know my brother as I do. He'd consider it a favor if you kept me for a year or two. You want to revise your act—it's out of date. Just switch it backward to meet modern ideas. Threaten to send me back if he doesn't kick in. That'll fetch him."

"I've heard that children and fools tell the truth," muttered Paul savagely. "I half believe this bird is right. I'd sure pay to keep him off-a me before he talks me dippy."

A peculiar whistle sounded outside the cabin window.

"There's the motor boat," cried the chief, jumping up. "We'll have to go out and give a hand, or Gil may not be able to tow this old turtle out of the mud it's resting in. Come on."

"Don't you want me to help?" shouted Monty as the disgusted pair hurried outside and locked the door after them.

From the deck came sounds of tramping feet and querulous voices. Orders to cast off and to get off and push until the old scow was loose from the mud, trickled through the cracks. These sounds gave Monty some idea of the activities progressing outside.

Evidently he was imprisoned in an old barge that had wallowed in mud until it had become almost a permanent landmark. Finally the straining and ordering stopped. The canal boat lurched off its mud perch and bobbed gently. The door rattled and the pair of kidnapers reentered.

"I hope you folks have considered the possibilities," their prisoner greeted them. "If you've got a launch instead of a tug towing this scow, and a government inspector happens to spot you, he'll be alongside in a jiffy. He'll probably make things unpleasant for you."

The chief and Paul exchanged worried glances.

"Anyway, he'll revoke that motor boat's license," added Monty solemnly. "Say! Are you taking me across to Jersey?"

"Suppose we are?" demanded the chief noncommittally.

"There you go! Never thinking of consequences," scolded Monty. "Kidnaping in New York only draws ten years, whereas in Jersey they soak you a twenty stretch for your favorite sport. Why cross over to make it tougher for yourselves?"

This assertion was delivered with convincing emphasis, although Monty had no idea what the law's penalties were. Neither did his captors, so his triumphant manner did not put them at ease.

"Suppose I said we're going there to put you on a rum runner's speedboat that'll take you out to Rum Row?" insinuated the chief. "I don't mind saying we may

wait in midstream and put you aboard there, if you're so worried about us."

"That'll make it a Federal case—piracy," gloated Monty. "Oh, you'll be in for it then. The government never lets up on such cases. You daren't kill me because you'll get the chair for that. And you can't go back because I arranged to have my van followed and the police called in if you went too far. What's more, your rotten old tub is sinking!"

Sure enough, as the two crooks gaped in the direction to which Monty pointed, they saw the water pouring in through the seams that were opened when the barge was hauled off the mud by the motor boat.

VII.

ABRUPTLY abandoning their prisoner, the pair rushed outside and shouted frantically to the man piloting the motor boat. Eventually they succeeded in making him hear above the popping of his engine. Their shouting orders to tow them back gave Monty his clew to developments.

With much yelling and running about, the barge finally was snubbed back to its mooring. The motor boat popped away after its pilot had hurled insulting retort to orders to return after dark.

"Will you boys recommend me for a Carnegie medal—for saving you from drowning?" chirped Monty, when the two discouraged-looking crooks returned to the cabin. They glared at him.

"Never mind the wise cracks," admonished the chief wanly. "Get busy with that note. No fooling now."

"Why, this pen is dry," complained Monty, attempting to write and failing to make any marks. While the others had been outside he had pressed the filling lever, squirting out all the ink.

"Hell, we're hoodooed!" expostulated Paul. "Is everything gone blooey on this job?"

"I don't think you boys know your business," criticized Monty. "You were fooling me when you said you were professionals. Was that nice? Looks to me as though you just rushed into this without enough preparation or rehearsal after

reading about me in the papers. I'll admit that it didn't give you much time to arrange the details, but—”

“But nothing,” snarled the crook leader. “Amateurs or professionals, we can deal with a sap like you. Forget the pen—a pencil will do for that note. Now start writing it before I count ten—or you won't ever write anything any more.”

He drew out a pistol with his right hand, while his left held his watch. His glance was sinister.

Monty folded his arms and stared indifferently at his captor, ignoring the weapon.

“One, two, three,” began the chief. Then, seeing his counting had not the invigorating effect desired, he broke off crossly: “See here, do you think I won't plug you if you don't mind? Because I will.”

“Very likely,” yawned Monty. “Who knows? If it is fated, it is fated, and neither of us can stop it. Kismet!”

“What's that?” demanded the other.

“That's Arabic or something for fate,” explained Monty. “You and I haven't anything to say about it. If I'm due to cash in now, it will come off, whether you're here or not. On the other hand, if my time hasn't come, you can't pull the trick. Personally I don't believe I'm due yet. But if it's written in the book, I'm not kicking.”

“Do you really believe that stuff?” inquired the chief, lowering his weapon and staring interestedly. “Are you a—a—”

“Fatalist,” supplied Monty, noting the interested look and making a shrewd guess. “That's me, mister. And I rather suspect that you are one, too, even if you didn't know the right word.”

“I have been through some tight squeezes,” conceded the chief. “But I always thought it was luck. Do many people believe this?”

“Millions of 'em in Asia,” Monty informed him. “If you have to die at a certain time, why worry until that time comes?”

“If that's the way you feel about it, we'll try some other method until I get ready to bump you off,” announced the chief, dropping into his prisoner's mood. “I never did like to kill a man on an empty

stomach. After Paul and I have had something to eat, we'll be in better shape. Maybe after we've kept you cooped up a day or so with nothing to eat, you'll feel like writing.”

“Nope. I've got writer's cramp,” asserted Monty. “I'm going to be a non-cooperator in this matter. Speaking of the Orient made me think of Ghandi. You probably read of him—even you. That fellow in India who refused to help his enemies. They put him in prison and he starved himself until he won out. That's what I'm going to do. You can kill me if you like, but I don't think you want to kill the goose that pages the golden egg—meaning me. Only I'm not a goose but a Ghandi.”

“You'll feel different after you've starved a while,” predicted the chief. “Run out, Paul, and get a big flock of eats. You and I will let this goof watch us feast. Maybe it'll get on his imagination.”

“Fine,” enthused Monty. “I always wanted to fast a week. The doc prescribed it for my digestion, but I never had the will power to stick it out. Now I'll have to go through with it, and it'll do me a lot of good.”

“Arrh! He'll drive me bugs,” snarled the gunman whose name evidently was Paul Marto, as he rushed from the cabin.

Left alone with the chief, Monty assumed a confidential manner.

“I couldn't talk in front of him, but you'll understand,” he confided. “You see, I'm not the real Monty Craig. I'm his double. He hired me to draw attention away from him while he did his stuff. I'm a playwright. Or rather, I've always wanted to be one. Now that I'm cooped up, I'll turn out that play I've always been intending to do. I took this job to study crooks at first hand for a crook drama, see? I'll just study your mugs for comedy characters. You'd hardly do for the leading rôle. Of course, if you can give me some good incidents for novel situations, I'll declare you in on the royalties.”

The chief was holding his head and staring dolefully at his prisoner.

“Maybe if you can give me some good ideas I might make you the hero,” prat-

ted on Monty. "You might figure as the misunderstood crook who has been forced through circumstances to go in for crooking. But they've got to be reasonable circumstances, mind you. You could be an enemy of society who preys on the unscrupulous rich. Misunderstood by all until a beautiful, rich girl falls in love with you and you retire to the great West to begin life anew. Start on your adventures."

The chief was sputtering incoherently and waving him to silence angrily.

"What? No adventures? Oi, what a dumb hero!" exclaimed Monty. The chief uttered an inarticulate gasp of rage. "Now, you're mad. That's your weak spot, I bet —your vanity. Don't you know vanity is a vice of small minds? Fellows who consider themselves big in their line, but are only peewees. You ought to be psycho-analyzed. Maybe it would dig up that when you were a kid somebody told you that you were smart."

"That'll do," choked the chief, irritably gagging his prisoner with a cloth.

The crook smoked in gloomy silence for a quarter of an hour. He was aroused by a peculiar whistle, followed by a tap at the door. He admitted a new man, a big, dull-faced lout with china blue eyes and close-clipped light hair. The driver, Bat, his opening remark revealed.

"I lost that van," he announced, shutting the door and pressing his ear against it after a warning gesture to the chief.

For five minutes or more the two men stood, silent and motionless, while Monty stared, unable to voice a warning. Suddenly Bat snatched open the door. At the same moment Paul rushed into the cabin with a rush of beating hands. In his grasp, fighting as the door closed to bar escape, was Ruth Lowrey.

VIII.

MONTY stared at Ruth as she stood defiantly in the grasp of Paul and Bat, the former holding a hand over her mouth to prevent outcry.

"Coming back, I seen her following Bat," reported Marto proudly. "She was sleuthing along the string-piece so

snoopy that I tumbled right away she was trailing him. But the poor frail was so stuck on herself for being a shadower that she didn't see me trailing *her*. I slipped up behind and found *her* listening at the door."

"Aw, I was on, Chesty," scoffed Bat, in a belligerent manner. "Don't think I'm dumb. I tumbled to the fact that she was following me right after I ditched the bright red emu cage. I wasn't sure, up to then. She followed me, driving in a little roadster all the way from down town. I suspicioned her, but it might have been a coincidence. So I stalled.

"When I found her hanging around outside the place where I telephoned, I was wise. I ducked into a subway and she followed. So I led her back here, knowing she'd seen the van back up here. I figger she missed the transfer when I had the van backed right up to the door here, so she wasn't sure we tossed this bozo inside the scow. So she trailed me to the Bronx. And then, when I ditched the bus, she knew Craig wasn't in it. Maybe she looked in the van. I figgered her to do just what she done. You know me, Trescott."

"Good work, Bat," approved the chief, now identified as Trescott, while Paul glared jealously. "You, too, Paul. I think we'll get a little action now. This fatalist will feel more like talking, now that we have his girl friend as our guest. Take off his muzzle and see if he'll do a little writing. How about it, Craig?"

When the gag cloth was removed, Monty presented a sardonically grinning face. The ungagging had given him a moment for fast thinking. Evidently Ruth had followed the ticket van from the time he started out in it—to watch over him.

"Lady, I'm surprised at you," he reproved, addressing Ruth. "Don't you know the rules? Correct, recognized stage business calls for you to come aboard disguised as a cabin boy. Why didn't you?"

His mocking words brought for a fleeting moment a surprised look to Ruth's face. Then she caught her cue and glared haughtily.

"Do you mean to say you still refuse to sign?" demanded Trescott incredulously. "Now that we've got your girl in our—"

"In your powerboat?" grinned Monty, although the grimace cost him an effort. "Sure. Why should I get excited? It's her affair, not mine. We've got equality of the sexes now. You wouldn't expect me to cave in because some man had blundered in here? Well, why should I for a woman? Say, you must be working by awfully old-fashioned rules. You've been reading stories where the hero is forced to give in because some jane is in the villain's clutches. I bet *she* hasn't got any of those nineteenth century ideas. She looks modern. I wouldn't be surprised if the lady is getting as big a kick out of this as I am."

"Applesauce!" scorned Trescott, but his voice wavered. "You're stalling—trying to kid me that this ain't your girl friend."

"Of course, if you say so," sighed Monty with a shrug. "To tell the truth, I wouldn't mind if you put her in her place. She gave me a dirty deal in that office building this afternoon. You remember I told you a couple of other crooks tried to mace me. Well, they used this doll baby for the decoy. Had her flop a faint in front of me to work on my sympathies and throw me off my guard. Old stuff! I got it right off the reel and didn't fall. But—trying to crash here! Isn't there any honor among thieves? I've been cruelly deceived by that old saw. And must I act as hostess of this house boat, introducing you yeggs to one another?"

"Do you belong to some mob?" demanded Trescott, turning to Ruth. Paul removed his hand to allow her to answer.

"What's it to you?" she demanded in a harsh, throaty voice suggestive of the cheap woman who dissipates.

It was so different from Ruth's ordinary tones that Monty scarcely could conceal his admiration for her acting. Her face and carriage were in character, too. Evidently while shadowing Bat she had applied the contents of her vanity box lavishly. This make-up gave her a bold, hard, highly-tinted appearance.

"You better lemme loose before my man

and his mob crashes here," she added, having caught the tip from Monty's jeering remark. "This is no way to treat a lady."

Trescott plainly was puzzled. He stared questioningly at his two prisoners. Monty was grinning gloatingly at Ruth who in turn was favoring him with a look of exaggerated scorn.

"What you doing here, then?" asked Trescott.

"None of yer business," snapped Ruth. "What d'you know about that?"

"Don't you extend the courtesies to—er—the professions?" inquired Monty impishly.

"Maybe she isn't your sweetie, but I still think so," evaded Trescott. "Shut her up in my stateroom, Bat, and give her the third degree. Don't be too gentle, and we'll see how this bird takes it."

"You'll be sorry. My man's a killer," threatened Ruth, as Bat and Paul dragged her through the outside door.

Trescott refused to turn his eyes toward her. He was staring intently at Monty's face, studying it for a single betraying expression, no matter how fleeting. And Monty was gazing cheerfully after the girl, as though he were witnessing an exciting comedy which entertained him completely.

This was no easy pose, for his ears were straining to catch any sound which might make him drop all pretense and sue for compromise.

As a result of their intense preoccupation, neither man was prepared for the sudden, whirling entrance through the door of Paul and a second struggling, scratching, fighting girl. As Paul threw her roughly around so that she faced them, Monty saw that the newest visitor was the girl crook who had tried to vamp him and then had pretended to faint in the hallway outside of Lawyer Peck's office. The girl called Belle.

"Hell! Is this the floating home for working girls?" panted Paul, flinging himself against the door to bar the girl's exit. "I was coming back from putting away the other one when I happened to look over the roof of the deck house and seen this one sneaking on board. I crouched behind a corner and let her walk smack into my

arms. What kind of game is going on here, anyway?"

Both crooks turned instinctively toward Monty. He was staring with stricken eyes at the black-haired, black-eyed girl who had been pushed into the cabin. His hands were shaking as though in great agitation.

"Sweetheart!" he cried in best melodrama style, lurching out to the limit of his chain tether and throwing his arms about her.

It was a mean trick, but he intended to protect Ruth at all hazards. The pals of this young person probably would take care of her and, anyway, she was no better than she should be. Tremulously, he continued: "These villains shall not harm you. Before I let them touch a hair of your head, I will tell all—I will give in to their demands."

As the indignant Belle gaped at him, Monty embraced her, pressing her face to his manly chest so that her furious expression would not be seen. And, of course, at that instant Bat returned to the cabin, pushing ahead of him Ruth Lowrey who stared reproachfully at this affecting tableau.

IX.

RUTH's face betrayed jealousy. She wiped out the telltale look as Trescott glanced sharply at her. He had turned so quickly that he caught the hasty change. At the same moment Belle introduced a divertissement by slapping Monty soundly and giving him a push away from her. The shove was so vigorous that it knocked him back over the chair from which he had risen. With a loud clanking of chains, he sprawled there.

"Laugh that off, sap!" snapped the indignant Belle. "What do you mean, trying to mush me? Fenton will break you in two for this."

"Who's zat?" demanded Trescott. "Winter Book Fenton?"

Belle turned smoldering eyes of scorn on the chief, but refused to answer. Trescott, however, had heard enough to set him to thinking.

"How she loves me!" moaned Monty, struggling to his feet. Ruth was laughing,

and the other woman turned sharply upon her.

"I've seen that pan before," she accused, staring hard at Ruth's face. "I can't remember just where. On the stage or in a pitcher."

"I dare say. I've been on the stage," boasted Ruth with exaggerated hauteur, tossing her head and placing one hand on her hip to register ritzy self-satisfaction. "I've been begged to go into pictures, too."

"Look out for her, she's slipping something across on you," warned Belle, addressing Trescott. Ruth raised a cynical eyebrow.

"She's slipping nothing. Neither are you, see?" stated the chief crossly. "All right, Bat. That was a good hunch of yours to bring this one back. They tipped off enough between them to wise me up. Take her back and lock her up. We'll tie the other one up here with little Rollo. As soon as they get to scrapping, we'll get the lowdown on this mix-up."

After Bat had returned from locking up Ruth, he helped his pals tie Belle to a chair. She and Monty relapsed into sullen silence while the three crooks ate the food which Paul had brought. They made a great show of enjoying their meal, but Monty eyed them torpidly.

Weariness was overtaking him after hours of exacting activities and nervous strain. He slumped down in his chair, indifferent to the scowls which Belle directed at him. His bored expression masked his straining concentration to hear what the captors were saying in their whispered conferences.

Fragments of sentences reached his ears. Something about the motor boat returning after dark. A word or two about looking for a rowboat with a red lantern, and how they were going to know if Gil made connections.

Occasionally one of the men would open the door to look out, or would step out to ascertain if Ruth still was under lock-and-key. At such times Monty could see that darkness was falling. After the crooks had dawdled an hour or more over their eating, drinking and waiting for some one, Bat rose and stared down at his leader.

"How about the kale? The ten grand?" he demanded. "What yuh done with it? I want mine before any more funny business comes off."

Trescott looked annoyed. Possibly he had hoped that the money had been forgotten. Paul interposed to explain their reasons for not opening the suit case sooner—the possibility of an infernal machine.

"When we come aboard, we tied it to a line hooked around a cleat and let it down into the water to soak," Trescott added. "I see now that Craig was bulling us, but we weren't taking chances. He seemed to be such a raving bug that it wouldn't be impossible that he had an infernal machine in it. Anyway, it was a safe place to leave it, where nobody would find it. And we've been so busy since, we forgot it."

"Well, I ain't forgot it and I want mine," announced Bat. "I'm not yellow—"

"Are you cracking at me?" demanded Paul softly, his hand in front of his coat.

"You two lay off," commanded Trescott. "I'll get that suit case."

Paul and Bat glared murderously at each other while their chief was absent.

Within a couple of minutes he returned, carrying the water-soaked, dripping leather case. This he placed carefully on the deal table directly under the swinging kerosene lamp which furnished the cabin's sole illumination.

His accomplices hunched their chairs closer to the table, their faces as eager as those of children at the moment of unwrapping the Christmas presents. Silently Trescott searched Monty, bringing to light a key with which he approached the bag.

"Oh-h!" moaned Monty in mock terror as he widened his eyes and held his hands over his ears to shut out the devastating explosion. Paul moved back uneasily from the suit case, and Trescott hesitated.

"Gimme that key. I ain't bluffed," announced Bat.

"Listen, girl," requested Trescott of Belle. "This bimbo says this is going to blow up if we open it. Do you know anything about it? If you're sensible, we may deal you in on this."

"He told Fenton and Kildee that it was

a dummy full-a paper," she replied suddenly. "I wouldn't believe that kidder under oath."

"Righto. Then here goes," declared Trescott, fitting the key.

"Hold on there! We declare in on that," rapped a voice from the doorway.

Framed in it stood the two men who had posed as office renters that afternoon—Fenton and Kildee. Each held his pistol with a businesslike aim which covered the rival crooks.

At sound of this greeting, Trescott and his pair sprang up in alarm, overturning the table as they faced the men covering them. The newcomers closed the door behind them and advanced a step, swinging their guns.

"Don't try a move for your guns unless you want to wear walnut bennies," warned the new spokesman coldly. "And thanks for opening the door. Your light guided us here when we saw you with that grip. You've got a friend of ours here. Untie her and be quick about it."

"You got the message I phoned to be given you after I trailed 'em here in a taxi?" asked Belle. "I got worried waiting for you, so I came aboard to spot what was doing after a dame came on."

"See here, Fenton—if that's your name," fumed Trescott, addressing the pear-shaped crook. "We pulled this job. It's ours, see? I may be willing to talk a split, but you can't come hijacking us like this."

"Very unethical, I would say," commented Monty. "No honor among thieves, and no privacy for prisoners. What about me, that was to be locked up here alone? Am I left alone? No! You might as well charge admission to let every one look at me and make a lot more money as showmen. It's a low state the good old trade of kidnaping has fallen into when the kidnappee has no seclusion—"

"Shut up!" roared Fenton, who had been staring and fizzing with bursting wrath as this surprising tirade ran on unchecked. "Have you got that two-legged broadcasting station here? He'd talk y—"

"Somebody's got to tell you guys how

to act," reproved Monty. "You're such amateurish and avaricious crooks that you don't even notice that we're adrift—and sinking again!"

He pointed to the side seams of the floor where water once more was pouring in. That and the gentle dipping of the barge corroborated him. Either the old tub had been insecurely moored when it was snubbed back, or somebody had cast it loose. The tide had risen, carrying the clumsy craft downstream, filling as it went.

At Monty's warning, the crooks momentarily turned their startled glances to the bubbling seams. In that instant's shifting of attention Trescott took a chance for his gun. As he snatched, Fenton's automatic streamed fire. Trescott toppled backward, his gun firing upward. Its roar mingled with the crashing of glass as the bullet shattered the lamp, plunging the cabin into blackness.

X.

AUTOMATICALLY, Monty dived to the floor as the lamp shivered to bits. He was just in time, as shots flashed out in the darkness overhead. His hands touched the wet leather case which had been dumped off the overturned table.

Stretching his chain so cautiously that it did not rattle, he wriggled to its limit. This carried him to where lay the still form of Trescott, which he used as a shield. Swiftly locating the crook's keys, Monty unlocked his leg chain.

In the dark around him were four men ready to shoot, each hesitating to fire for fear of hitting a pal or betraying his own whereabouts. A sound would invite an exploring shot.

Wriggling back noiselessly, Monty again found the suit case. With all his limited strength he tossed the grip up into the air so that it would fall as far from the door as possible.

That unmistakable thud of wet leather landing heavily on the floor was the signal for a concerted dive by every other man in the room. Monty could hear them plunging, grunting and striking as they fought for the prize, and he also heard

Belle begging to be cut loose. He did not pause. At the first sound of scrimmage, he wriggled as fast as he could go toward the door, reached up, pulled it open and darted outside.

What to do next was his problem as he slammed the door shut behind him. He would have to improvise instantly, which was one of the best things Monty did.

He could dive overboard, although he was not a powerful swimmer and the barge was well off shore. As long as Ruth was a prisoner on board, he would not desert. And he knew that, alone, he could not hold shut the door against the exertions of the men in the cabin. That they would follow as soon as they could untangle themselves was certain, for he was the one common foe of them all. They were crooks, and he was their intended prey. He had to act quickly.

Startlingly, a man's head and shoulders rose above the side of the canal boat. The man was standing, spread-legged, in the cockpit of a motor boat which tossed on the gently heaving river. He was trying to sink a boathook into the barge's deck with which to hold the motor launch alongside.

"That you, Gil?" demanded Monty eagerly, hurling at the shadowy figure the name he remembered hearing Trescott use in ordering the boatman to return after dark.

"Yeh," came the hesitating response. "Who are y—"

"Quick! Come aboard—you're needed," urged Monty, seizing the boathook and steadyng it. "Toss me your line, and I'll make it fast. Trescott needs you on the run."

He seized the line thrown to him and gave its end a turn about a cleat. The boatman was scrambling aboard from the launch which Monty had drawn alongside. In the darkness the man was staring at him.

"In there, with your gun," directed Monty imperatively, waving toward the cabin door. "Chief and Paul and Bat having a row with a couple who tried to hijack the dough. Quick."

He gave the man no time to think. As Gil hesitated, trying to make out this in-

sistent stranger, Monty opened the door suddenly and gave the boatman a violent push. Taken unaware, Gill lunched indoors, knocking back two men who were struggling to exit. The door was slammed behind him instantly.

Without another moment's delay, Monty slid the boathook through the metal loop door-grip. The ends of the stout pole lapped over the edges of the narrow door which was hung to swing inward. Caught through the hand loop, the pole made a good door bar which would hold for a few minutes against all tugging from within. Then Monty darted away from in front of the door just as pistols roared out, splintering through the wooden barriers with steel-jacketed bullets.

Running to the only other door opening on the deck of the piratical barge, he tried it and found it locked. This would be the stateroom to which Trescott had referred.

"Ruth, are you there?" he shouted. A muffled cry answered him.

Monty hurled himself against the door, only to have it resist his impact. He scurried around the gloom-shrouded deck, pawing at every dark object in the litter with which it was strewn. Here he found a timber heavy enough to suit.

With this gripped in both hands, he charged against the lock. At the third crashing drive the old door smashed open. In a bunk, tied and gagged, was Ruth, whom he assisted to the outer air.

"Our palatial yacht is going down by the head—if that is the head," panted Monty, supporting the girl whose legs were cramped from being bound. "We've got to get off promptly or sooner."

This was evident, even to a landlubber. The canal boat was already listing. From within came frantic yells and shots. Again Monty demonstrated his adroitness in wriggling while flattened on his front, as he crawled along the deck to a spot where he could untie the motor boat's line. This done, he hauled the launch along to a place out of range of such bullets as might erupt through the door.

"Let us out. We won't shoot you," pleaded a voice through the bullet holes. "The water is up to our knees. We're—"

"All wet," concluded Monty, resuming his usual mood.

That door was yielding. He jumped to the motor boat's covered stern and held to the barge, steadyng the smaller craft while Ruth joined him.

As Monty took a backward step to help her down into the cockpit he emitted a startled yelp. His foot had struck a yielding human body.

That it was alive was proven promptly by a muffled groan. Monty cast off, and then raised the bound-and-gagged man who had been lying in the cockpit. Ruth, who understood motor boats, started the craft away from the barge and switched on the light over the controls.

"Temple!" exclaimed Monty, as he recognized his brother's face. "You old rascal, did you actually come alone to ransom me?"

"Is this another of your pranks?" peevishly mumbled Temple Craig, working his unbound jaws. A crash and yells from the barge convinced him that his suspicions were unfounded. "They telephoned me to bring fifty thousand dollars and to drift down from Spuyten Duyvil in a rowboat showing a red lantern until a motor boat came alongside with the password 'Monty.' After all, you are my brother—you went to bat for me once, so I—"

"You old trump!" enthused Monty, glowing at this unexpected proof of brotherliness. "And you ventured out with fifty thou—"

"Well, no, I didn't bring the money," admitted Temple. "When I tried to dicker with the man, he got mad and tied me up."

Crash! The barge's door burst outward.

"What boat is that?" roared an authoritative voice, as a searchlight suddenly flooded the region with its radiance.

"That's the police launch that was to follow me," explained Temple. "They kept so far behind in order not to arouse suspicion, that they must have lost me in the river traffic."

"This is the U-23 submerging," yelled Monty. "Hurry up, officers. I've got 'em nicely boxed for you to put away."

After the police had dragged off the wet and disgruntled rival crooks and had re-

stored the wandering suit case, Ruth scolded Monty for the foolhardy uselessness of his weird venture. As she said:

"It was an open invitation to crooks."

"Exactly. That was my idea," grinned Monty cheerfully as the prisoners were herded into the police launch. Included among them was Trescott, whose skull had been creased but not perforated.

"There are too many criminals loose around New York," explained Monty. "They can't be arrested unless they commit a crime. So I gave 'em a nice lil crime to commit. Furnished opportunity for the

greatest number so they can be retired from active business. I put it up to the commish to have cops ready to round up any who bit, but he thought it was a wild idea and said lay off. He said his cops had enough to do tending to regular crime without any synthetic. Still, I had to teach Temple something, as well as prove myself to somebody else."

"Meaning?" she prompted.

"Somebody told me to fight and make a name," Monty reminded her. "I had to show you. And I'll have to postpone my sale until to-morrow."

THE END



THREE KISSES

YOUR first kiss
 But brushed my cheek
 As lightly as the tips of a butterfly's wing!
 Cool and sweet as the petal of a rose—
 Such a kiss might a child receive.

Again you kissed me,
 I felt affection's warmth—not the glow
 Of passion
 When your lips met mine,
 Tender, kind—
 Such a kiss might a friend give.

Again. Ah! *That* kiss
 Held something of the bliss
 We dream of as Heav'n;
 And something of the desire
 That may be Hell's fire!
 Burning, unsatisfied, remembered, longing—
 That last!
 Such a kiss might a Francesca know.

* * * * *
 Was it the last?
 Or will *that* be like snow?

Glen Visscher.



Flight to the Hills

By **CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK**

Author of "The Battle Cry," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II

WADE MURRELL, a Kentucky mountain clan leader in his later twenties, comes in to Asheville, North Carolina, to collect thirty thousand dollars for a timber holding. Driving homeward in a covered cart, he finds a girl, semiconscious, in the road. She is Cynthia Meade, a New York actress with a small part in a motion picture now being filmed in the Asheville setting. The girl is in a panicky flight in the night, having been the only witness to the slaying from ambush of Jock Harrison, a New York man about town. She fears a murder charge; Jock Harrison had been pursuing her. Cynthia appeals to the mountaineer to aid her flight, and he agrees after she declares she is a good woman. She obeys Murrell's command to wash off paint and powder, which in the mountain country denote the scarlet woman. Lesher Skidmore, leader of a rival clan, spreads a poison-tongue report about Cynthia, who has assumed the name of Stokes. Murrell's mother, known as Aunt Lake Erie, scorns this hostile gossip and welcomes the girl. But a visitor is announced—Miss Purviance, a fearless aristocrat who is admired by the mountaineers—and the little actress shrinks from her verdict.

CHAPTER XI.

A CLIENT'S CONFESSION.

LEFT alone again, Cynthia crept to the window with a heart that was thumping wildly against her ribs. She saw a woman of perhaps thirty, clear-eyed and erect, flannel shirted and clad in dependable khaki. The face proclaimed such character as had enabled this woman to come into a land of hatred and prejudices, and to smooth them all into friendship for the

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building up of a school that was shaping a new generation out of feudal children.

But it bad, too, the stamp of breeding—a stamp that Cynthia recognized as the mark of one who stood separated from herself across the boundary of society and sympathy. However roughly she might be dressed, in whatever hovels she might talk the simple language of her mountain friends, this woman would still be the aristocrat with the aristocrat's best heritage of simple graciousness and intrepid courage.

But Cynthia, standing behind her window shutters as if beleaguered in her fort, saw in her the approach of an accuser, and she half crouched in the posture of an animal at bay. Her face darkened and her eyes hardened into the glitter of preparation for a battle of self-preservation. This would be a struggle between women. Wade Murrell could no longer help her.

Cynthia remembered a painting she had somewhere seen: a Christian martyr standing in the dusty sun of the Circus at Rome, with eyes fixed on the iron-barred gate through which presently the lions were to be let in.

She was hardly a Christian martyr, yet to her eyes the bedroom door became an iron gate, and her situation became that of awaiting destruction.

"So you're the cop on this beat, are you?" she snarled fiercely under her breath. "You damned Meddlesome Matty! Well, you may get me—but I'll give you the best I've got. I'll give you a run for your money before you send me back to jail!"

Five minutes later there was a knock on the door, and, forcing a stiff smile that masked a ferocity of desperation, the girl opened it upon Aunt Erie and the locally canonized Saint of Doe Run.

While the mountain woman was making introduction, Anne Purviance was looking at Cynthia Meade, and Cynthia Meade at Anne Purviance. There was feminine character gauging in each glance.

To herself, the Bluegrass woman, who knew her New York and her Appalachia equally well, made immediate comment: "Broadway! Broadway and the Forties."

To herself, Cynthia as quickly decided: "Madison Avenue and the uplift bunk!"

To each other, they said negligible things, like prize fighters sparring lightly before the slugging begins.

Perhaps it was prearranged that the older woman should at once leave these two alone together. Certainly Cynthia assumed that it was all a part of the heckling game of which she was to be the victim.

"I understand," began Anne Purviance, smiling, "that you come from Asheville, yet I fancy you're not a southern girl, are you?"

A sudden gust of crazy passion swept the refugee, and under its buffet she lost her self-command—lost it completely and deplorably. This woman knew of Asheville. How much more did she know?

Cynthia had told herself a minute ago that she must fence warily, parry diplomatically. Now, her fighting instincts all welled up with the gallant but brainless savagery of a charging bull. Her senses reeled and gave way to a temporary chaos like lunacy.

"What if I'm not a southern girl?" she demanded. "No, I'm not. I'm from N'Yawk, and that's a good enough place, if you ask me."

For a moment the visitor drew back and her fine eyes mirrored their astonishment at this rebuff. Then she spoke gently.

"I seem to have made a mistake," she said. "I had no idea—"

But Cynthia cut her savagely short.

"Oh, I guess you had the idea all right enough. You know that people have been spreading rotten lies about me. Wade Murrell knows they're lies—but his mother isn't so sure. So she sends you in to give me the once-over. You're supposed to know everything in God's world. I've heard what a female Solomon you are."

She broke off panting, her eyes blazing, possessed by a transport of demoniac rage that was all the cumulative overflow of her strained nerves. Then she drew back toward the wall and stood there defiantly, blazingly silent.

"What reason could I have," asked the perplexed visitor, her own temper evenly controlled, "to fall in with any plans to 'spread lies' about you?"

"Why should anybody horn in on other people's business?" Cynthia countered angrily. "God knows, I don't. I suppose it's the mania that makes a certain sort of buttinsky want to run everybody else's business. I only know that lots of people try it. Well, go to it!" Suddenly, she broke off again and fell into a tempest of tears. She dropped into a chair and hid her face.

"What have I ever done to you," she demanded, "that you can't leave me alone? I—I wanted to stay here."

Anne Purviance stood silent and perplexed for a moment, then she came over. "My child, my child," she said kindly, "this whole thing is a riddle. I came in friendship—and I'm greeted with fury. Of course—" her voice became even graver and more troubled. "Of course there's some thing serious behind it all. You're in trouble—but why do you think I'm your enemy?"

"Well, why did you have to come snooping?" wailed Cynthia miserably. "Wade Murrell asked me the only question he had to ask. He asked if I was a decent girl. God knows I could tell the truth when I said yes. It was Wade Murrell that told me not to answer any questions."

"The only one I have asked you was by way of greeting."

Cynthia rose and leaned unsteadily against the wall. She shook her bobbed head and stared dazedly out of tear reddened eyes.

The quietness of this woman, who wore her khaki with the gallant straightness of a cavalry officer—the sense of calm power that shone out of her face, for the first time, went home to the fright-maddened little fugitive. Now, she recognized their import.

She had been a fool flinging down the challenge of enmity and insult to some one who might have been a strong friend. She had assumed the attack of a persecutor and had rushed savagely and blindly on her fate. Now, the stranger whom she had affronted could write to Asheville, as doubtless she would. She was no hermit for whom a line of mountains walled in a separate world.

The eyes that held hers were unflinching eyes, veiled just now with a sober thoughtfulness that shut out the kindness which the girl had so tardily recognized. They seemed the grave eyes of a judge weighing evidence and seeing deeper than surfaces.

It was her own fault, Cynthia realized, but it was too late now to remedy it. She stiffened and hardened with that same spirit that causes the gunman to brazen out his fate when his appeal is denied and his last hope is gone.

"Well," she said in a hard voice. "I've spilled the beans again. I took you for a

third degree artist, and I've turned you against me. I don't blame you, at that." She paused, and as her companion remained silent, she went on.

She was talking with the defiant aggressiveness of one who defends her class and caste against a recognized superior.

"But you aren't one of these hill-billies. There's no good trying to stall you. It's too easy for you to find out the truth. Just the same, you might as well know one thing in my favor, and as God lives I'm not lying. I'm giving it to you straight. I know that I look like a rough soubrette to you—and that's about what I am. But I'm straight. I'm as straight as you are. I'm as straight as any woman in the world."

"I haven't questioned that yet," came the sober response.

"Everybody else is questioning it around here, and you must have heard the slurs. That's why this old woman hasn't made up her mind whether to let me stay or run me out."

The girl was standing rigidly straight, now, against the background of the loom upon which hung the half finished quilt. Her small fists were clenched, and her eyes were inordinately bright, but her cheeks were pallid and her voice went on slowly in a despairing yet resolute monotony.

"I don't want to be run out—because I can't go back where I came from. I'm telling you what I haven't told anyone else. Even Wade Murrell doesn't know. He didn't even ask. As God is my judge, I'm innocent of any crime—but there's no way to prove it. They want me back there in Asheville for killing a man—a man that I didn't kill. Now you know it all—now it's up to you."

Had those same lines been given her to speak in a scene on the stage the director would doubtless have suggested some effective business of gesture and tone to heighten their tragic effect. This was in life—and the little actress spoke with dulled inertia. Her only gesture was a shrug of misery.

A long and painfully freighted silence hung in the little room after Cynthia's confession. Anne Purviance's cheeks had paled a little under their tan.

¹ Wave after wave of surprise had broken

over her during the little time she had spent in this room. She had come with no sense of judicial responsibility; with no intent of probing the conduct of another.

She had, of course, heard casually of the arrival of a young woman who seemed, from current gossip, to be a misfit in such a life.

Acutely conscious as she was of the unique mountain character, Anne Purviance had wondered whether a demoralizing influence might not be coming with the stranger. That was as far as her thoughts had gone, and now in the space of minutes she found herself called to judgment.

In the slight figure that stood white faced and terror stricken, but erect before her, was a heart-twisting declaration of human pathos. Anne Purviance was well equipped to appraise something of her character, and her appraisal brought a rush of pity to her heart. This girl was cheap, uninformed, vulgar even, but somehow one felt that this was partly, at least, because life had done little that was generous to shape the inert matter of her moral composition into worthy contours, or to galvanize it into admirable vitality.

Along Broadway one might see many like her. Some of them sank into degeneration and some of them arose to fame. But in her very virago passion there was a germ of gallant battle, and—illogical as it might seem—in her eyes was a convincing light of honesty. She said she was innocent, and her eyes held some intangible light that strongly corroborated that assertion—or so Anne Purviance believed.

At last her voice came low, and her words were deliberate.

"You shouldn't have told me all this," she said reproachfully. "I didn't ask—and you had no right to saddle me with such responsibility. Perhaps you don't know that one who shields an alleged criminal—compounds a felony—becomes an accomplice."

"But I'm not guilty. I told you I wasn't guilty."

"You said, too, that you couldn't prove it."

"It's about what I thought," Cynthia's tone was tired and uncombative now, but

still bitter. "All the good people in this world stand together for the law. It doesn't seem to matter how rotten unfair the law may be."

Again, the woman from the "fotched-on" school hesitated. She was holding the curb of judgment on impulses of sympathy. The two emotions must be honorably united or judgment must prevail. Then decision came.

"There's a way out, I think," she said. "I don't know just why—unless it's that I trust my intuitions—but I believe you when you say you're not guilty. I happen to be a lawyer, and although I don't practise I can consult."

She paused, and explained briefly: "Before I started into this work I decided that I'd need to know some law and I studied. I've been admitted to the bar. If you want to regard me as your attorney, you can talk, and what is said between us is legally as confidential as confession to a priest."

"Do you mean you *want* to keep my secret?" There was incredulous bewilderment in the question, and the fine head of the other woman nodded grave affirmation.

"If we can come to terms—and agree on a fee," she announced with a faint glimmer of a smile in the soberness of her fine eyes, "I want to help you, but I want you to help me, too. If we can agree it will be fine. Of course, I mean if I don't find I've been wrong in my estimate of you. It's based on snap judgment so far, you know."

"What can I do for you? Everybody is on your side."

Anne Purviance came over and laid a hand on Cynthia's shoulder.

"Sit down, my dear," she suggested. "You're tired. I'll tell you what you can do for me. It's true that I heard the stories about you, and they disturb me. I was glad to have a chance to see you."

"Why? How could I hurt you even if the stories were true?"

"You don't know this country. You don't know how hard it has been to smooth away century old prejudices—to overcome the suspicion for the 'furriner.' We had to do it—and by patience we succeeded. Otherwise, the children that were thirsting

for education wouldn't be allowed to come to us. If the feud breaks out again—if the old murderous hates leap up again—all our efforts go into the scrap heap. All that we've built up tumbles down. The children will be taken away from our class-rooms—and set back to learning hate and bloodshed."

"Yes, I can see that but—"

"Wade Murrell," the teacher went on, "has struggled year in and year out to keep that peace—and he's been our friend. If his enemies can discredit him, this section of the mountains will slip back to outlawry—and those enemies are apt to make you a pretext. Wade let his generosity run away with his judgment when he befriended you."

Cynthia clutched at the other woman's arm.

"You aren't going to make me go away, are you?" she demanded. "That isn't going to be your fee, is it?"

Anne Purviance shook her head.

"No, but I'm going to dictate the terms on which you can stay. You must remember that the affairs and the safety of a good many people may depend on any trouble that arises—and, after all, you are only one person. Those questions may depend on how carefully you behave yourself—how careful you are to keep the peace. You can do us a lot of harm if you don't watch yourself. I want to help you, but my life and my work belong to these mountain people. I must think of them first."

Cynthia told her story, and the candor with which she recited it left no doubt in her hearer's mind of its truth. Putting into words for the first time those events that had hurried and harried her through such nightmare horrors seemed to bring a wonderful ease and relief to the girl's heart, and when she finished she looked up out of wet eyes.

"I know now why they call you a saint," she said.

Anne Purviance flushed, and to cover her embarrassment she spoke almost brusquely.

"These ugly stories about you will be kept persistently alive for a time at least. You've got to live them down. You've got to be patient. You've got to remember

that many innocent things will be misconstrued. You're under suspicion here, not only because of yourself, but because of Wade's enemies. Remember that, and act accordingly."

"I'm not going to try to vamp anybody, if that's what you mean—I'm not going to try to jazz up the home life of these hills. All I'm asking just now is to stay out of jail."

"But that's not all. You and I know that in New York, in any town, there are all sorts of men—and women. Here, to these simple folks, a 'furrin' woman'—just a 'furrin' woman'—and she's 'quare.'"

"So it's up to me to be the simple little ingénue—and not to make any wise cracks?"

"Here, you will be the example of the lowlands. People will point to you. They will judge us all by you. If they condemn you, they may condemn us, too—and some of us can't afford to fail here. The school still has enemies."

"I've never been a big hit actress," declared Cynthia soberly, "but I've got it in me. I'll play this part for all I'm worth. This is a Cæsar's wife character—one hundred per cent pure and above suspicion twenty-four hours a day."

The Saint of Doe Run smiled, but before she could answer they heard a hand on the door, and Aunt Erie flung it open.

"La, Miss Purviance," exclaimed the elder woman. "Does ye know I plumb wishes this hyar gal hed done hed ther power ter fotch her trunk along with her. I'd p'int-blank love ter see all ther partiesthet I'll bet she's got packed away."

The teacher smiled and the mountain woman went on:

"Some day, when thar hain't nobody hyar save only me an' her ter git scandalized by our goin's on, I'm goin ter git her ter fix herself up for me with all her paint an' powder an' all ther balance of hit. I'll bet she'll be as purty es a flower pot."

"I'm afraid," suggested Cynthia demurely, "Mr. Murrell would object. He threatened to scrub the rouge off my face, if I didn't do it for myself."

"Wade, huh!" His mother snorted. "When me an' you hes thet leetle dressin'

up party he'll hev ter pass by me ter git at ye—an' I'll hev a rollin' pin in my hand."

Outside at the stile, Cynthia and Aunt Erie were bidding the teacher from Perry County farewell. As a turn of the road took her mounted figure, the girl wheeled impulsively to the older woman.

"Aunt Erie," she demanded breathlessly, "you're going to let me stay, aren't you?"

"Let ye stay, child? In God's name, why wouldn't I?" Aunt Erie demanded in perplexity. "We've done a'ready med ye right welcome, hain't we? Hit's a treat fer sore eyes to see a comely gal erbout ther place once more."

Cynthia laughed breathlessly.

"I was afraid you were going to give me my notice," she said. "I thought you sent Miss Purviance in to decide whether I was a proper sort of person to have around or not. I was afraid these stories about me—"

Abruptly, Aunt Erie straightened up. She was the rugged woman of the frontier, courageous and intensely jealous of her rights.

"My boy Wade, he trusted ye," she said simply. "An' that's all I needs ter know. We don't suffer our enemies ter dictate ter us, an' hit's our enemies that's spreadin' pi'zen talk. Lesher Skidmore, he fathered this commotion. I knows ther Skidmores—"

She broke off, and her eyes blazed.

"When I was a gal," she declared in a strained voice, "they kilt my pappy. They kilt my brother, too, an' I hefted his body out on my own withers an' buried hit myself by dead of night, with a lantern. Thar warn't no one else thar ter do hit. I toted him up ther hill and dug ther grave an' said ther prayer. Does ye reckon I'm liable ter be swep' off my feet by Skidmore talk?"

It was as if the thunders of the peaks were suppressed in her voice.

"Ef so be any man deems he kin dictate ter us whether or not ter enjoy ye in this house," she declared, "let him bust down ther door an' come in shootin', because, afore God A'mighty, he'll hev ter shoot his way out ergin'."

Lesher's plan had worked admirably. Although no one could quote any Skidmore

as speaking a derogatory word, yet the impression of Cynthia that had percolated into neighborhood minds was distinctly derogatory. It even seemed that what was said in praise was a transparent effort to cover a sinful act. Every circumstance that tended to build suspicion had gone into the record, and Lesher's empty compliments had only served to heighten their effect.

So stimulated by curiosity and full armed with questions, visitors began to arrive.

They came on foot, on horseback, on mule-back and behind plodding ox-teams. Some artlessly pretended to be breaking their journeys elsewhere. Some inquired about the sale of the timber tract. A few, very few, announced with forthright candor, "We heered tell a furrin' woman came home with Wade. We 'lowed we'd love ter see her."

The girl, standing slim and a little pale in the clinging, straight-lined dress that had been Broadway's imitation of Fifth Avenue fashion, felt that their eyes were embers burning hotly into her and through her.

It was at sunset that a visitor came who aroused in her both an instinctive fear and an inordinate impulse of derisive laughter.

She felt intuitively that this grotesque figure impersonated the bigoted cruelty of the Pharisees; the witless, witch-burning brutality of provincial intolerance.

This visitor wore a battered high hat, a long frock coat, threadbare and discolored, a flowing necktie without a collar, and his dust-brown feet were bare. Unkempt hair fell straggling to his shoulders and a lawless beard straggled over his face so that his eyes seemed to burn furtively out of ambush. He pounded the ground with a hickory staff five feet long—and his jaw wagged to a constant muttering.

Wade Murrell, leaning against the wall of the house where the dog run cut through its center, eyed the visitor coolly, and a flash of sardonic amusement stole into his eye. Here, he thought, came the first ambassador of trouble, but he nodded tolerantly.

"Is that her?" demanded the eccentric bluntly, jerking his head toward Cynthia and driving straight to the gist of his inquiry.

"Thet's Cynthy Stokes," was the calm reply. "She's tarryin' hyar a spell with my ma. Cynthy, this hyar man follers hoss-doctorin' sometimes an' he follers preachin' ther Gospel sometimes—an' folks tells hit that he follers moonshinin' mighty nigh all times. He goes by ther name of Brother Ezry Harley."

The veterinary-preacher seemed unoffended by the introduction in spite of the margin by which it fell short of eulogy. He turned his eyes on Cynthia again, and demanded with the bluntness of a cross-examiner:

"Gal, what mout yore business be hyar-erbouts?"

The girl winced and felt her knees weaken as the interrogating eyes glared at her. She began to stammer: "Why—why—" but with a quietly lifted hand and an incisive voice Wade Murrell cut in.

"Hold on, ma'am. I'll answer that." He turned to his guest. "This woman's dwellin' under our roof, Ezry. We don't hold ourselves beholdin' ter answer no idle questions erbout her."

Harley turned on Wade and raised both hands above his head in a ludicrous semblance of pontifical authority.

"When a woman that don't favor no handmaiden of ther Lord God comes among us," he thundered, "folks craves ter know ther which an' whether of hit—an' folks aims ter know."

The several other guests who lounged about the door, gave excited little exclamations and followed with relish a situation that broke the drab crust of monotony. Wade's voice pitched to a soft quiet broke the ensuing silence with a brief question.

"What folks, Ezry? Ther Skidmores?"

"All folks," the answer was boomed out with orotund unction. "I s'arves ther Almighty an' ter me all godly folk air sheep an' all sinners air goats. Thet's what ther Bible-book says an' hit's God's own word."

Wade took a step forward and a dangerous scowl stiffened his lips, but it was Aunt Erie's voice that spoke first, and it spoke with a cheery equanimity that seemed to clear the atmosphere.

"Brother Ezry," she said. "Ther char-

acter of gospellin' ye follers, hit hain't our brand an' we don't crave none of hit—but I reckon mebby ye does know somethin' erbout hoss doctorin'." She paused, and her eyes held a shimmering of repressed mirth. "Do yore exhortin' somewhere else, Brother Ezry; ye're in ther wrong meetin' house hyar—but that's a mule out in the barn that right sensibly needs salvation. Wade, he rid him clar from Cyar'liny without no irons on his feet an—"

With the capriciousness of his queerly disorganized mind, the old man dropped his heavy solemnity. He relaxed abruptly out of his attitude of a pontiff hurling a curse and a new interest tinged his voice with eagerness.

"Whar's ther critter at?" he demanded. "Hit's fer cash. I don't foller doctorin' mule-critters save only fer cash." Then he turned to follow Aunt Erie toward the barn.

Wade nodded his head to Cynthia.

"Ezry's kinderly fittified," he offered brief explanation. "But yit he's got a master follerin' among some folks—Murrells an' Skidmores alike."

The evening meal was over and the sunset fanfare of color was deadening into night. The stars were as yet pale, too, because though the upflung heights had darkened into indigo, the sky over them still held a ghostly aftermath of light. As the peaks thickened into somber night shapes, they had the seeming of drawing closer and huddling together with a sense of suffocating massiveness. Yet the air between them was thin and clear and sweet, and in mid-sky rode a young moon.

After the full-colored brilliancy of day came the softer, sweeter colors of night fashioned of moon mists, of silvers and blues. From the blackly curtained forest sounded the calls of the whippoorwill, and from the creek bed rose the chorus of frogs.

In tilted chairs about the dog run sat those neighbors who had tarried on, and those who had freshly come. Wade Murrell's pipe glowed from the doorstep, and two youths with a banjo and a "dulcimore" picked a plaintive accompaniment as their voices droned out strange "song ballads" that were survivals of the days

and ways of traveling minstrels. Just now they were singing of the murder of Lawyer Marcum:

"So his heart was pierced by the rifle ball,
Captain Ewing was standing right there—and
saw him fall."

There was a thin quaver of tragedy in the words and the tone, and Cynthia Meade shuddered in her chair. The voices went on, wailingly:

"Leetle Curt Jett is payin' his debt—
In ther prison in Frankfort Town—"

All nature was tuned to peace, to loveliness, to tranquil beauty. Every human note stirred with the restless sense of impending menace, and this was the country which, for all its serenity and grandeur, the red man had named "the dark and bloody ground."

CHAPTER XII.

RETRIBUTION.

IN the door of Cynthia's room in the pale light of early morning stood Aunt Erie.

In her arms she carried a nondescript mass of clothing, and even in that dimness Cynthia could see that her eyes were tear-misted.

"Es I told ye yistiddy, honey," began the hospitable Amazon. "Ye kain't go round dressed in blue denim pants like a Jackaro, an' nuther kin ye w'ar them clothes o' yourn that's too slight an' gauzy ter endure."

She paused, then went on: "This hyar room ye're a sleepin' in, hit used ter be Lake's. Lake, she was my gal an' she was named fer me—Lake Erie, but we most always called her Lake fer short."

Cynthia sat up in bed rubbing her eyes. She had slept dreamlessly, and the air tasted sweet in her nostrils.

"I didn't know you had a daughter," she said, and Aunt Erie shook her head.

"I hain't. Not now. She's dead." She broke off as if the words choked her. "Lake, she died two year back—an' I reckon ther best part of me lays in ther grave with her. Wa'll, these hyar be her clothes. I couldn't somehow bring myself,

fust-off, ter proffer 'em ter ye. Seemed like every time I looked up an' seed 'em, I'd behold a ghost—but yit ye needs 'em—an' she won't nuver need 'em no more."

Cynthia crawled out of bed. She did not regard herself as a sentimental person, and all the sophisticates, whose columns she read in the New York papers, used the word "sentimental" as the ultimate of scathing contempt. Yet, now, she found a catch in her throat as she looked at the big-boned woman who held her armful of clothing in a close embrace against her breast.

Cynthia came over and laid a hand tenderly on the broad shoulder.

"Mebby ye've done noted thet things round hyar is right sensibly tidier then what ye most gin'rally sees in mountin' dwellin' houses," went on Aunt Erie. "Thet's Lake's doin'. She fared over ter Miss Purviance's school in Perry County—an' when she come home she learned us things we didn't know afore. Most folks hyarabouts, they don't like ter hev blossoms growin' in th'ar yards. They calls 'em weed gyardens an' 'lows they gives rise ter ailments from dampness. But Lake, she come back home lovin' lilies, an' she planted 'em out, all colors. Them hollyhocks out thar is some of Lake's lilies."

Cynthia drew her brow in perplexity at this announcement. She had yet to learn that to the mountain folk, all flowers are lilies—just as bouquets are "flower pots."

"She l'arned how ter braid rugs an' weave kiverlets thet furriners paid good money fer, too," went on the mother proudly. "Thet's her loom thet stands right over thar—an' thar's a kiverlet still on hit thet she didn't nuver git ter finish. She knew all ther patterns; log cabin, Star of Bethlehem, an' ther balance an'—". The woman laid the clothes down on the mussed bed. "An' I reckon these hyar clothes thet she made herself is nigh good enough fer anybody. Ye're right welcome ter 'em."

Aunt Erie turned and went hurriedly out. It was as though she had opened a flood gate of emotion, long closed until now, and could no longer trust herself to talk.

Slowly Cynthia dressed herself in the raiment that Lake had fashioned under the instruction of the "fotched-on" school

women. She thought her unpainted cheeks, as given back by her mirror, were ghastly pale, and that her lips were dead as veal.

"I'm made up for a backwoods jane, and I'll tell the world I look like a wreck!" she exclaimed to herself, and yet she said it with surprising cheerfulness. "Not a ray or a glimmer of looks left, but a person can't have everything and, thank God, I'm not in jail!"

Yet had she known it, she was slim and fresh enough to stand as nature had fashioned her. Had she been able to read herself aright, her beauty was now for the first time clean and unflawed by a cheap grotesquerie. Her skin held the dewey freshness of the laurel bud instead of the overdone flamboyance of the make-up box, and the curves of her young body were dryadlike under the crispness of yellow gingham.

She longed to relieve what seemed to her a deadly plainness by just a touch of lipstick and rouge. She hesitated and resolutely shook her head. "You're on probation, deary," she told herself, "and to these saps a little decent make-up is the brand of scarlet sin."

Wade had disappeared when Cynthia came out to breakfast, and to all her suggestions that she be made useful, Aunt Erie had turned a deaf ear.

"After ye've done got sottded down," she decreed, "thar 'll be a lavish plenty ye kin do. I reckon, by rights I'd ought ter pay ye wage money, but I don't want ye underfoot terday. Jest santer round an' git used ter things. That's always what a cat does in a new place. Jest wanders an' sniffs—an' then he feels plumb at home."

So Cynthia wandered. She inspected the bee gums and Lake's "lily gyarden," and after that she aimlessly followed the rutty road that ran along a creek bed, shaded by paw-paws and locusts, noisy with waddling geese.

Suddenly she came on a tumble-down building that was palpably a schoolhouse. It sat near the road and its children were shouting and screaming about the bare, tramped inclosure. It was recess time.

In the open door of the place leaned a disheveled young man whom she at first took for a gawky, overgrown pupil, but

whom she decided, at second glance, was the teacher.

Down there by the creek bed stood a half dozen boys whom one would have judged to be men, by their stature. Physically, they were full grown; mentally, perhaps they would never be grown. Some of the younger of these were pupils. Two or three of the older were merely loafers.

As Cynthia came near she felt that they were staring at her with a disconcerting and hostile directness, but that seemed an attitude to which she must accustom herself. She strode on, and as she came abreast of the group she nodded.

"Hello, boys," she said.

There was no answer save that one of the young louts made an exclamation that sounded like "Sooey! Sooey!" and the others laughed.

With angrily flaming cheeks, the girl passed on, and in her path wallowed a razor-backed hog. A small, tow-headed girl came across the way just then, and also encountered the hog. Promptly she kicked it with her brown, bare foot and yelled: "Sooey, ole sow. Sooey!"

At once Cynthia realized the import of the insult that had been offered her a few steps back. "Sooey" was the word with which humans said "begone" to hogs!

She paused involuntarily and turned to look back. The group of man-sized boys had drifted along after her, and as she paused, one of them yelled out in an ugly stridency of passion: "Rock ther strumpet! Rock ther strumpet!"

With an appalled shock of realization the girl knew that she was in actual danger of a rough hazing, but she had a vein of iron in her and she could not believe that she was threatened with anything worse than verbal insult. So looking over toward the schoolhouse door, where the teacher still slouched, she called out in a peremptory and disdainful tone:

"You'd better teach these young rough-necks manners, I should say."

The teacher must have heard. He was near enough to hear, but he made no response, and to her terror Cynthia saw a stupid-faced lout of a youth reach down to the creek bed for a stone.

She thought of him as a youth because he was loafing at recess time with schoolboys. But no business of educating himself brought him there, and the bloodshot eyes in his saturnine face, which was already definitely shadowed with the beard of later adolescence, bespoke recent communion with the liquor flask. He stood almost six feet tall and must have weighed close to a hundred and sixty pounds.

Cynthia met his eye defiantly, but the young moron glared back at her, then, as deliberately as a baseball pitcher, "wound up" and let fly his missile with the force of his full weight behind it. It was evident that he was not merely trying to frighten her, for the thing hurtled shrilly past her ear, and the assailant reached down for another.

Then before Cynthia had quite realized the gravity of her peril, rocks and clods of clay were flying around her head, and from the firing squad came yells of genuine mob frenzy: "Kill ther strumpet! Kill her!"

Recognizing that if she was to be saved, she must save herself by flight, the girl turned and ran for the woods.

A heavy bit of shale struck her on the shoulder, wheeling her about as she ran. A clout of heavy mud landed full on the back of her head. She turned, facing her pursuers, as a mouse turns in futile desperation on a cat, and her head went back under the impact of a blow full in the face.

She thought at first that her jaw was broken, and she knew that blood was flowing from her nose and her gashed lips. That last blow might well have crushed bones or broken teeth, except that it had come not from a stone but a clay lump pressed like a snowball.

Cynthia Meade stood stunned and reeling. Some sense of need kept her still upright, though she rocked on her feet. She was face to face with actual destruction at the hands of a little mob of morons. Once more she turned wildly appealing eyes toward the schoolhouse door, and there, still slouching and inactive, stood the teacher.

To the unlettered and unlighted mind of that dull thing the scene he was witnessing was a thing sanctioned by the law of Moses. Women were safe and protected here in the

hills, but among them one was not to count witches and fallen women. They were evil—when one stood out in the public eye, however much to be desired or sought in secret. To list a defensive hand was to array one's self with sin. Besides, the teacher was afraid of that big youth who was leading and urging on his squad of youthful but potential murderers.

The rocks and clods were coming thick and fast now. Their punishment was insupportable. She was being stoned like some adulterous creature of Bible days—and in a few minutes more this thing must mean death. Her face was bleeding and her body was a mass of bruises. Her brain reeled, and always in her ears sounded those maniacal shrieks of "Kill ther strumpet!"

With the sickening shock of another blow, Cynthia went down. It would have been a merciful thing had she become insensible, too, but although her consciousness was blunted, the realization of pain remained, seemed even unendurably heightened—and with that was a confused realization of what was going on about her.

She heard a shot. It would seem that stones from the creek bed were not enough. But to her amazement at that sound, the volley ceased and her assailants began scurrying in every direction as quail scatter before a gun. She could not be sure now that her eyes were serving her because she was too stunned and groggy for any certainty.

She lay in a crumpled heap where she had fallen. The warmth of blood that tasted salty was in her mouth and its wetness was stealing down her face.

Then, in cloudy fashion, she realized that rescue had come.

Wade Murrell, with a smoking pistol in his hand, splashed through the creek.

"Don't run, or afore God I'll kill ther last one of ye," he bellowed. "Git ye in ther schoolhouse, an' go speedily!"

The teacher had scurried out and had made a break for the laurel, but a second admonitory shot from the pistol halted him dead in his tracks, and he sloped back into the building.

Murrell came hurriedly and bent over her. His face was death pallid, yet not so ashen that the scar was not whiter. He

lifted her and carried her in his arms, still holding the pistol before him. She could feel the cold metal of it against her face.

Inside, huddled like scared rabbits, stood the half dozen imprisoned members of the precocious mob, and at their center their equally scared teacher.

Wade Murrell put Cynthia down as softly as he could on one of the long benches that went along the wretched wall of the place.

"I'll be back d'reckly," he told her. Then he strode over and blocked the single door.

Cynthia was sobbing softly, and except for that, the drop of a pin might have been heard through the shac': in which that "blab-school" was taught.

"Save thet ye're accounted ter be children," came the voice of the man at the door, crackling like torn canvas, "thar couldn't none of ye go outen hyar without every bone inside ye broke. Es hit is, I'm goin' ter suffer all of ye ter leave save only Daws Small, thet egged ye on—him an' Jake Carmichael thet teaches this school."

The voice snapped off and then ripped out again, more electrical than before. "Go home an' tell yore daddies ter whop ye within an inch o' yore lives. Don't fail, because ef hit ain't done, I aims ter do hit myself—an' do ther like fer them."

Once more the pause followed, a pause made necessary by such a surge of passion as necessitated economy of the effort to speak.

"Es fer Daws Small thet fomented this business," went on Wade tensely, "when he goes outen hyar he's jest barely goin' ter be able ter crawl home an' tell his folks what befell him." He wheeled and faced the teacher, who was shivering and sniveling in pathetic terror. "An' es fer Carmichael, thet calls hisself a man an' holds a teacher's s'tificate, he ain't even goin' ter be able ter crawl home. He's goin' ter lay hyar twell they comes an' fotches him away—"

Wade Murrell flung open the door, and under his arm the culprits sneaked out one by one. At the end of the line, driven by a compelling fear, young Small made a lunge seeking to break through with his

companions, but he took a fist full in his mouth that loosened his front teeth and toppled him back like a ten-pin, bleating with terror. On his hands and knees he looked up pleadingly from the floor—and saw no omen of mercy.

It was a typical mountain schoolhouse of the meaner sort. At the far end its teacher huddled on his own platform of authority with a dilapidated blackboard behind him. Along either side of a center aisle went heavy benches and desks hewn from oak logs, and the few windows were high placed—so that the children might not have their attention distracted by gazing out across the green slopes. Now, that architectural detail made escape hopeless.

Deliberately, for all that there was need of haste in getting Cynthia back to his house, yet with the realization that time well taken was time saved, Wade Murrell dragged two of those bulky benches over and piled them against the door which he had barred. Then he flung aside his coat, and from the automatic pistol drew out the cartridge clip and emptied the chamber. He tossed the unloaded thing aside, and, like a human bull, hunched his shoulders by the door and glared ahead of him.

There, at the far end of the aisle, as far away as they could retreat, the two men whom he meant to punish awaited him.

Daws Small, with a trickle of blood flowing from his snarling mouth, was crouching like a dog that awaits the lash. The teacher was shaking as with an ague and his teeth were chattering. Yet, as these two saw what Murrell was doing, as they realized that he was disarming himself, and that they stood two to one in a free for all, a shade of hope and desperado courage came stealing back into their fear-chilled blood. They did not want to fight. Even if, between them, they could whip this man, they faced the after consequences of his wrath. But that they had already incurred, and they were cornered rats. Each hoped that while the other was being chastised he might himself effect an escape.

For a moment, like a bull pausing before his lunge, Wade stood at the door savagely eying them; then, with an infuriated roar, he launched himself to his

charge. The two waited for an instant, then scurried in opposite directions. It was Small whom Murrell caught first.

Cynthia Meade, lying on the bench where she had been placed, saw it all as one sees the wild impossibilities of a delirium. Her consciousness was fogged and distorted. Her senses played her queer tricks. The real and the unreal were inextricably tangled and blurred. But she had the sense of lying on the outskirts of some lurid inferno, torn and echoing with howls and the crash of splintered wood.

It seemed that men were being tossed about as chips are tossed on a whirlpool. They were rolling in confused masses. They were charging and giving back in an indescribable fury of onslaught and flight. Yet two were always in desperate retreat and one always in implacable pursuit.

The teacher tried to climb out through a window, while Wade's great shoulders heaved to a fusillade of blows driven volley-wise against the huddling and cornered figure of Daws Small. Upset benches lay in a welter. Murrell left Small and went charging over the débris to drag Carmichael back by his frantically kicking feet.

Then, through her stupor, the girl roused herself for a shriek of warning. Small had snatched up a heavy stool, and with it lifted at arm's length above his head, was scurrying across the room to floor his punisher from behind.

Wade, admonished by that outcry, flung the captured teacher to the floor and wheeled. As he turned, the stool crashed down. The uplifted forearm of the rescuer caught at the thing and the rescuer dodged sidewise under its impact, but even that glancing blow was enough to send him down, and when he fell Cynthia saw the two burl themselves on him with howls of brief triumph.

With a chill of horror shaking her, she closed her eyes, and when she dared to open them again—her ears still full of clamor—she saw two men standing crouched and facing the aisle. The teacher was nowhere to be seen now, but Murrell and Small stood, both disheveled, both torn of clothing, both panting furiously, both bloody and bruised of face, glaring each

at the other. Small's features were distorted now with a desperation that had cast aside fear—and he held a wicked, dirk-bladed knife in his hand.

Once more she closed her lids, and consciousness left her. How long that lasted she did not know, but waking to sensibility again she looked up to see a sweat-grimed and bloody Wade Murrell standing over her.

Toward the reopened door a six-foot, hundred-and-sixty-pound youth was painfully crawling.

On the floor, in an excellent counterfeit of death, lay the tattered remnant of a man.

Murrell lifted her into his arms again.

"I'll aim ter tote ye es easy es I kin," he said to her. "An' hit behoves us ter git home right soon."

Just before he reached the bend, which would give his own house into view, Wade Murrell halted. The salty sweat was streaming into his eyes and blood from a gash across his forehead, which would leave him one more scar to turn white, was mingling with the sweat to blind him.

Very carefully he laid the girl down on a grassy bank, and he saw that she knew nothing of what was going on. The flickering of consciousness and unconsciousness had made of her last half hour a series of mental dots and dashes, of lurid impressions and blank gaps. Now the man straightened up and wiped the grime and wet away from his stinging face.

Suddenly, with the poignancy of a sharp pain, the slim beauty of this creature from another world smote him. She lay there so frail and so pallid, yet to his inexperience exemplifying so much of the fineness of a world of which he had only dreamed from afar off. She seemed to his eyes as fresh, as fragrant, and as altogether lovely as some dewy blossom of the laurel touched into life—and now bruised again close to death. To him she was human delicacy, human refinement, and she had been stoned almost in the shadow of his own house, when he had promised her the protection of his strength and his roof.

Once more the young mountaineer felt himself shaken and thrilled by her physical

nearness. A flood of passionate tenderness surged through him, and his bruised hands clenched themselves into knotted fists. The veins stood out on his lacerated face and a lump came into his throat.

"As slim—an' as bright as a sickle moon when hit's new," he said chokingly. "But I reckon ye hain't fer me—an' I've got ther need ter hold thatt knowledge right spang afore my thoughts, day in an' day out—in sunshine and in moonlight. I've got ter do hit, because God, He knows ef I ever let hit slip I'd be bodaciously ruint."

He lifted her again with tender care and plodded on toward home. As he climbed the stile with his burden, Aunt Erie came running out, her eyes asking questions and her eyes answering them.

Together they carried Cynthia into her room and laid her on her bed.

"They nigh broke every bone inside her," said Wade grimly. "An' ef I'd been a minute tardier I'd hev been too late." He paused, then said: "That's a wrecked schoolhouse back thar on ther creek, an' I reckon her bones hain't ther only ones that's broke, but—"

Aunt Erie's eyes were ablaze.

"But what?" she demanded with an up-leaping of ferocity.

"But I reckon that's a new war on now. I reckon hit's in ther bilin' clar back ter ther branchwaters—wherever a boy goes back an' gives my message ter his pa."

This woman, whose husband had been brought home to her murdered, nodded a sober head. The blaze had died out in her eyes, and into them had come a quiet, enduring steadfastness. Her voice was calm.

"Let hit come, son," she said. "Ther sin of hit won't rest on us—an' when hit's over ther sorrow won't all rest on us nuther!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT LOSING GAME.

ALTHOUGH the settlement school at Doe Run was only a little more than twenty miles distant from the waters of Little Flinty, it was still in a separate and to all intents and purposes,

a distant community. Mountain miles are cumbered with hazardous difficulties, pitched downward and flung upward until they take on a meaning and a meanness of their own.

Two or three ambitious children from Wade Murrell's neighborhood, like his sister Lake, had gone over there to Doe Run, and the hunger for "learnin'" had spread—but as yet it had been a mostly unsatisfied hunger.

Riding now, on the day after her visit to Aunt Erie, and thinking with meditatively drawn brows of the girl she had met there so out of the picture in appropriateness, Anne Purviance came to the house of Murrell Coates, from whom she had had several unusual letters.

It was to confer about the subject of these letters and others of similar purport from neighbors of like mind that the woman had ridden the long way from Doe Run. It was in a spirit of unofficial friendliness that she had stopped at Aunt Erie's house.

Now sitting before the door of Murrell Coates, while his sons were afield and wife was busily carding wool, Anne found herself looking into a bearded, sober face on which a stamp of earnestness was deeply etched.

"I don't look after wealth fer 'em," the man was declaring with a reserved throb of patient eagerness in his deep voice. "What I craves fer is ter see our young uns fotched up fer serve ther livin' God an'—sence that makes a right good beginnin'—ter serve themselves."

"That ought to be the aim of all education," the teacher agreed.

"We've done studied an' pondered what ye've a'ready compassed over thar at Doe Run," went on Coates. "Children hev done gone thar ragged an' lost ter knowledge, an' they've done come back after a spell with a new sparkle-light in thar eyes an' a new sperit in thar hearts. We wants a school ther like of thet over hyar, ma'am. We're hurtin' fer hit like a sick man hurts fer a doctor."

Anne Purviance leaned forward.

"Are you ready for a school like that—over here, Mr. Coates?" she asked. "When we began over there we found a mighty

strong current of opposition running against us—a pretty powerful suspicion of 'fotched-on, newfangled notions.' "

"Aye, an' ye'll find a lavish of 'em hyarabouts, too, but that only goes ter prove how jedigmatically much we needs ye. But over erginst that sperit of contrariness ye'll find some siv'ral men like Wade Murrell an' me ter stand clost ter yore elbow an' hold up yore hands when they wearies. All I owns in ther world air my land—but I stands ready an' willin' ter give ye half of that, measured acre fer measured acre, an' more ef need be. I stands ready ter sell an' saw lumber-wood an' see ter yore fust house-raisin'—an' Wade, he stands ready, too."

"And Lesher Skidmore?" the woman made dubious inquiry. "If he threw his influence against us—wouldn't it defeat us and open up the feud feeling to boot?"

The elderly hillsman nodded his head gravely.

"Ef so be ther peace bruck down," he admitted, "thar wouldn't be no elbow room hyarabouts fer naught else save war—but Wade, he's mouty heedful ter hold ther truce safe, an' Lesher, he acks like he seed hit in ther same light. Belike he kin be persuaded." He paused, then went on: "What's ther profit of strivin' after peace jest amongst ther old an' headstrong unles-sen ther young uns kin be reared up ter esteem hit, too? Old trees is gnarled an' sot in th'ar shapes, but young saplin's kin be started straight. Thet's what we're strivin' after, ma'am, an' that's what schools like yourn kin compass." He paused and waved his hand outward.

"Take ye a sight an' a see over them thar hills an' coves. Ther folks that fust come hyar they was pioneers—frontwards lookin' and frontwards farin'. They've done dwelt hyar like pioneers from that day on. They brags that they hain't changed none, an' yit they've done changed ther same fashion es a tree that's stopped growin' an' commenced ter root—in them old days, men fashioned outen what nature give 'em whatsoever things they needed—an' they fashioned 'em good. Thar warn't no better rifle-guns nowhars then what our gunsmiths turned out; that warn't no sturdier

linsey-woolsey then what our women wove. We was folks out ahead of civilization blazin' ther way—an' then we sot down like folks aimin' ter despair an' quit."

His eyes were agleam with a rude poetry of visioning. His voice was touched with a fire of untaught eloquence.

"We're ther folks that hewed out ther road fer all ther citizens of ther land—an' now we hain't got no roads—of our own. We says ther pioneers esteemed simple qualities an' so we aims ter stay thataway. But I tells ye p'int-blank we've done sot down. We've done lost our holt on all ther knowledge of ther past an' we hain't seized holt on none of ther knowledge of ther present. We hain't got no eye fer ther future. We're jest p'ntedly crumblin' away an' boggin' down—an' our young uns air a-growin' wild an' pizen-rank like weeds. Hit's my notion that pioneers shoves for'ard, an' when they quits shovin' they hain't pioneers no more. Thet's fer why—"

Suddenly he broke off to listen to a rapid hoof patter beyond the turn of the sandy road that ran by his house just beyond the swinging bridge which spanned the creek.

"Thar's some person," he interrupted himself, "thet's a-comin' hither in right tormentin' haste."

Young Velmer Coates, a fifteen-year-old nephew, "lit down" from his mount and blundered up to the door. He was young enough to permit himself the abandon of excitement which older stoics must learn to repress.

"Pap bade me ter tell ye that grievous words done come from Wade Murrell. Ther fotched-on woman at his dwellin'-house has done been rocked at ther schoolhouse—an' I reckon they've done well-nigh ruint every bone she's got."

The informant broke off pantingly after this contribution of news, then he caught his breath and rushed on to a fresh start.

"Pap heered tell that Daws Small fo-mented hit an' Wade he feathered inter him an' nigh bruck every bone inside him. Pap, he 'lows that's a hell-broth a-brewin' an' bit p'int-blank looks like old Covey Small aims ter rile ther Murrells up ergin Wade an' spew him outen th'ar mouths."

The lad, with youth's ability to derive

pleasurable excitement out of any prospect of martial conflict, closed his message with a prophecy. This editorial comment was evidently reflected from some words that he had heard fall from the lips of his elders. " 'Pears right sensibly like"—he squinted his eyes sagely—"thar's a new war on; not betwixt ther Murrells an' Skidmores this time, but betwixt ther Murrells an' ther Smalls."

Murrell Coates was standing, and as he had listened his grave face had given no open manifestation of excitement. Now he asked:

"Did ye say this hyar business come ter pass at ther schoolhouse? Hit must hev been some boyish prank that went too fur. Or else"—he turned his eyes to the woman and shook his head—"or else," he added, "some folks must feel mouty convinced that ther woman hain't nowise decent. I hain't nuver knowed no v'ilence showed no women—save only witches an' trollops."

He paused, then suddenly his eyes blazed.

"Hit come ter pass at ther schoolhouse!" he exclaimed. "Thet's ther character of schools we've got over hyar, ma'am—schools whar they rocks women folks, an' starts a hell-broth a-bilin' in ther kettle-pot. Thet's ther character of schools we've got ter send our young uns ter! Thet's what our teacher-folks 'larns 'em!"

But Anne Purviance had risen.

"Will you get me my horse, Mr. Coates?" she said in a voice of unusual quietness. "I guess I'm needed over there at Wade Murrell's. I guess the girl needs me."

"I ought to go away," wailed Cynthia Meade from the big four-poster bed in which, propped up with pillows, she was almost lost under bright colored quilts. "I ought to go away. I've no right to bring trouble and danger on your heads. But why should they all get such hates on me—and where in God's name can I go?"

The girl had emerged light-headed from her touch of delirium to find herself a mass of aching bruises. She was lying in that bed with the big body of Aunt Erie looming over her like a beneficent giantess. Her

senses, wakening slowly to a realization of her whereabouts, had caught a sense of haven and security. Her eyes had wandered from the brightly green oak branches framed by the window to the spot of burning color against a dark wall, where a shaft of sunlight fell on a drying string of red peppers bright as holly.

As she had lain there gathering up and patching together the broken and frayed strands of remembrance, her fears had come flutteringly back—and yet there in the big bed she felt strangely comfortable—and safe.

In spite of Wade's first fear that she had been hopelessly broken and mangled, she seemed to have almost miraculously escaped major damages. Even her face was not disfigured beyond cuts and abrasions that would soon heal, and though her slim body was blackened with many contusions, it was her nerves that had suffered most. They had been shaken and unstrung by this unwarmed taste of a mob's ferocious instinct to batter down and kill.

Between the walls of the room hung the strong and pungent odor of herb-brewed simples and liniments. In the eyes of Aunt Erie gleamed a strange blending of protectiveness for her and ferocity for her assailants.

"Go away?" echoed the highland woman, and a short laugh of defiance punctuated the question. "Yistiddy ye mout hev lit out an' gone ef so be ye seed fit—but now ye hain't goin' nowbars without ye defies both Wade an' me. We'd done vouched fer ye—an' folks hes a license ter know we don't vouch fer no lewd women." She paused and drew a long breath.

"Hit's too tardy now," she made grim summary, "ter make airy differ betwixt affrontin' *you* an' affrontin' us. Wade's done been looked to ter stand in his daddy's shoes, an' his daddy, he headed ther Murrells in war time an' peace time. These hyar folks that flew mad at ye, they was all Murrells—an' they've done flung defiance at Wade. Hit's got ter be seed now what comes ter pass. Wade, he hain't givin' back none."

"But I brought this all on. I'm the cause of it." The girl's eyes were full of suffering

and self-reproach. She seemed a sobered ghost of the flippant creature who had scorned Asheville.

"La, child," the voice became swiftly soothing, "I reckon ef hit hadn't 'a' been you, hit 'd 'a' been somebody else. I reckon ther horn spoon of Lesher Skidmore hes been stirrin' ther kittle pot an' these pore fools hev done been beguiled with ther brew. Moreover, we likes ye—an' we wouldn't love none ter see ye go away."

"Did Mr. Murrell—" The girl put her question faintly. "Did Mr. Murrell tell you all I'd told him?"

Aunt Erie nodded energetically.

"I reckon he's done told me all he knows," she replied. "Him an' me, we're right-outspoke with one another." The woman paused, and into her stern eyes flashed that vagrant glint of laughter that was always as surprising as a shot from ambush. "Wade, he seemed satisfied," she gave assurance, "an' whatsoever sots easy on Wade's conscience, hit don't fret mine none. Wade, he's got a mighty tormentin' conscience, anyhow. He's a good boy an' a godly, upstandin' man—but he mout be jest a shadder less pious without hurtin' my feelin's none."

The mother shook her head emphatically, then went on as though afraid she had seemed disloyal to her son. "I'm a full believer in prayer. I don't belittle no godliness, but yit thar's times when I 'lows that overly pious folks keeps after ther good Lord with thar supplications twell He's plumb pestered an' wore out with 'em."

Cynthia shook her head and shifted her uneasily aching body in the feather bed.

"I'm a goin' ter leave ye alone now," Aunt Erie told her, "so ye kin drap off ter sleep. But don't fret yoreself none too master. Ye're a Murrell now, an' me an' Wade, we stands with ye." A note of pride sounded in the words. "Sometimes us Murrells gits kilt—but I hain't nuver heered tell that we knuckles under."

Cynthia did sleep. Exhaustion had told on her, and now the realization of protective strength seemed to build a wall of confidence about her within which she could, for the time at least, let go of fear and drift into a languorous ease.

She was awakened by the sound of her door opening and she heard two lowered voices there. She opened her eyes then, and saw one figure only in the room.

It was the figure of Anne Purviance.

"I'm sorry," said the girl in the bed rather feebly. "I meant well. I was all set to play the part you wrote for me. I was going to be the shiny-eyed little angel. Butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. But those roughnecks jumped me before I got the chance to register goodness." She fell moodily silent and brushed back the rumpled hair from her eyes. "Did you come to tell me that I've broken my contract?" she asked desperately. "Because for once it wasn't my fault."

Anne Purviance shook her head and smiled.

"One can't break a contract before one starts with it," she answered gravely. "I came to see how badly you were hurt and if there was anything I could do."

Cynthia wondered afterward and never could quite tell how that conversation shaped its course. She knew, though, that she talked and that Anne listened, and that eventually, when the sun was lowering and the room was beginning to darken, she found herself telling this other woman intimate things about herself.

"It was all funny in a way about Jock Harrison and I," Cynthia was saying ungrammatically. "I had been over at Fort Lee where they were making a picture. I'd had an extra part in a carnival scene and I was made up for a gypsy dancing girl. I'd been pounding Broadway for weeks hunting a job. Day in and day out it was always the same—one agency after another—always the same answer: 'Nothing to-day, deary. Keep in touch. Something may turn up.' But nothing ever did." The girl paused with a single noted laugh of wretched memory.

"I was just about down and out. The landlady at my lodging house said I'd been stringing her along just about to the limit and a little bit past. She said God knew her heart was soft, but He likewise knew the landlord's wasn't and the gas company's wasn't. So unless I could kick in with something on account she'd have to pass the

buck to some other angel of mercy. As for her, she was through. So was I—allmost."

The story came in the matter-of-fact tone of blunted emotions, spaced with little silences.

"Well, maybe you know that game and maybe you don't—the game of bunting food and fame on Broadway. Here I was with the looks and the ambition and, even if I do say it myself, with the pep and talent to make good either in musical comedy or on the screen—and yet I was just about at the point where I had to sit down and decide which it was for me—street-walking or the river."

There was a hard note of desperation in the voice now—a note that seemed grated from rough and unyielding surfaces of life.

"Oh, of course, I know. A decent girl doesn't consider street-walking. That's out—not to be considered. I had that idea, too—but I find that most everything depends on how hard you're pressed—on how hungry you get. Well, I never came to it, anyhow."

"Go on," prompted Anne Purviance quietly.

"Then on this day I got word at one of the agencies to go across to Fort Lee for this extra part in a movie. I thought my luck had turned—and Mike knows it was time for it to turn. I thought it meant a week or two at least of solid work—maybe an opening. Everything looked jake. I beat it over there like a hot-footed young gazelle—and I got out of it just exactly one day's work and a pay slip for five bucks."

"But you were going to tell me about Mr. Harrison."

"Yes, I'm coming to him now. He's a principal in this ten-twent'-thirt' of Little Cynthy's Great Temptation. He deserves to have his entrance worked up. He doesn't just walk on." Once more Cynthia, whose eyes were gleaming resentfully as she sat propped with pillows, broke off.

But the saint of Doe Run smiled and nodded, and the story went on.

"Well, this day at Fort Lee, they'd been shooting some scenes in the picture, and we were called back for some retakes in the

afternoon. Meanwhile, we were all eating hot dogs and drinking coffee in our make-up, in that little quick-lunch place where you see the Emperor of Rome and Sitting Bull and Queen Elizabeth and a gang of vamps and heavies in dress suits elbowing each other at the counter."

Once more the girl paused, and her listener, who happened to have sampled that fare as well as many others in her travels, saw in memory the tatterdemalion picture presented.

"Well, he was in there, too—Jock Harrison. He was a distinguished visitor, strolling over the lot, taking in the sights and enjoying the freaks. He was the guest of Jake Wolf himself—and it was Wolf's picture I was working in. Well, he saw me and he seemed to find me easy to look at. Anyhow, I didn't appear to hurt his eyes unduly. Wolf called over the director that had been using us, and ordered him to bring up the Jane in the gypsy rags. That was me, see? Well, I was brought up and I can't say I hung back on the bit."

She lay gazing for a little while straight ahead.

"This Mr. Harrison treated me as if I'd been the lead in the piece instead of an extra, and I played right up to him. I wasn't exactly upstage, but still I tried to get it across to him that I wasn't just riff-raff in a mob scene—and he seemed to fall for me. Then he and Wolf strolled off and I went back to the set for the retake."

"Was that all of that?"

"I thought so at the time. But as I was walking down to the ferry that afternoon a car pulled up in the road. It wasn't so much a car as a dreadnaught on wheels with a chauffeur in a swanky livery—and Mr. Harrison leaning on a walking stick in the tonneau."

Cynthia laughed a shade grimly.

"Well, that was the beginning of it," she said. "He recognized me in my street clothes and I got quite a kick out of that. It showed that it wasn't just the ragtag-tangle gypsy make-up that had rendered me pleasing in his lordship's eyes."

"And I suppose he invited you to step into his car instead of walking to the ferry?"

"He did that little thing and he didn't stop there. He suggested driving down to the Brevoort for dinner." There was a brief pause again and an ironical chuckle. "Now right at this point in the narrative," went on Cynthia, "it's necessary for you to get proportions right. It's necessary for you to visualize what a dinner at the Brevoort looked like to me just then. I'd been faring sumptuously out of the milk bottle and the saltine box for quite some days past. That dinner proposition listened good to me, and as Aunt Erie would say, the dinner itself et right good, too."

"Yes—and then? What was the outcome?"

"There wasn't any comeback just then," answered the girl. "Of course, in the story with the moral, that dinner would be the first false step and all that. But little Cynthia was keeping a sharp lookout up aloft. She got that gentleman's number right quick and it wasn't any wrong number either. She hasn't taken the false step yet—unless happening to be on-stage when he got shot was it."

"You say you got his number. What was it?"

"Maybe, after all, I don't deserve much credit for that," acknowledged the fugitive. "There wasn't much bunk about Jock Harrison. He was willing to give you his number any minute you asked for it. He was ready to be nice to me. He was willing to smooth out all my money wrinkles—and all he asked was that I should be nice to him. A girl couldn't get up and rear and rave about being insulted—because he beat her to it by laying his cards right down on the table. He wanted to be friends—and he was so plain about his notion of friendship between a rich man and a busted girl that if the girl got any false notions it was her own fault."

"Then, at least your eyes were open."

"They were—and they still are. I didn't pull any offended virtue stuff. I just told him I was much obliged, but there wasn't anything doing. I saw that there was class to the man. He wasn't any of your cheap Broadway sports. He was the sort that knows women like you as well as women like me. To women like you, he'd be sim-

ply slopping over with honor and chivalry. To women like me—well, he looked for a good fellow. I've got to hand it to him in one respect, though. He declared himself at the start."

"And when you told him that—that you were not—what then?"

"He took it in the same spirit that I said it. Said he was for me if I saw it that way, and no harm done. But—this is where I blame him and blame myself, too. He didn't mean what he said. He pretended to drop that angle of our friendship and offered me a straight loan of five crisp twenties—to be paid back when I got a job. They didn't mean a thing more to me just then than five life preservers to a poor swimmer with the cramps, bobbing up for the third time, and I reached for them."

Anne Purviance sat with gravely understanding eyes.

"You realized, though, didn't you, that he was still of the same mind?"

Cynthia nodded.

"Sure," she said. "But I didn't stop realizing there. I went a step or two further than that. I tried to outguess him. Jock Harrison was falling for me pretty hard, see? I could read the signs well enough to know that. He saw me only as a cuty worth chasing after, just then—but why shouldn't he come to see me as something else? That was how I figured it. If he said one thing and meant another, why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, yes, I might as well admit it. I fell for him, too, like a ton of brick, right from the start. He was a gentleman—when the stage was set for that. He was handsome. He was rich. Well, he could have me—and welcome—provided the little detail of a wedding ring wasn't overlooked. That's the game I set out to play with him."

"And you didn't win it?"

The girl shook her head and her eyes clouded.

"No—I didn't win it—and yet if he'd lived, I believe I would. He was fighting hard—and he'd begun fighting foul. He was getting me jobs that weren't good enough—and he was keeping me from getting jobs that were—but he couldn't cut loose—and, if he'd lived—I'd have won."

"It wouldn't have paid," the older woman disagreed. "A man forced into marriage like that—wouldn't have lasted well."

Suddenly Cynthia clasped her hands over her face and broke into wild tears. "Now, he's dead," she wailed. "I'll never see him again."

CHAPTER XIV.

A SHOT IN THE NIGHT.

"It seems to me," suggested Anne Purviance, when Cynthia's storm of tears had swept gustily over her and left her breathlessly silent again, "it seems to me that you've overlooked one rather important thing. Mr. Harrison was shot and your story strongly indicates that the shot came through the window. Some one fired that shot. Perhaps by now the police know who did it—and know that you didn't. Why don't we try to find out?"

"No! For God's sake, not!" The girl sat bolt upright in bed and spoke gaspingly. "Any questions we asked here would start them asking questions there. It would call their attention to this place. I'm not looking for the spotlight just now. No—just leave things alone. I know you mean to help—but I can't stand it—not yet, anyhow. Here, as long as I don't chirp or breathe loud—I'm safe. There—it's the gallows!"

"Hardly the gallows," commented the other woman quietly. "The State prison, perhaps, but in the Carolinas it's hard to get a death sentence against a woman."

"Oh, I know that," declared Cynthia excitedly. I only talk about the gallows because that seems to go with murder—but it's not really death I'm afraid of. That would be better than the other. I think I could face that better than prison. Almost anybody can go through with one big scene. But years and years behind bars—month in and month out, a convict! That's what crimps a person's nerve. That's what paralyzes a person's heart. I knew a girl once who'd been in a reformatory—I can seem to hear her stories now."

She paused, then rushed on again.

"I guess lots of slackers could be brave

as lions if you could guarantee that they'd come out of the battle safe—or dead. It's the wounding and crippling that scares them. That's the way I feel about prison. I know they wouldn't be apt to hang me or send me to the chair—but I'd rather they did than to put me behind bars—in a cage. They have chivalry down here in the South—so they don't give women death." Her voice became almost hysterical in its bitterness and protest. "It's the same sort of chivalry that makes men like Jock Harrison respect women like you—and try to make playthings out of women like me. It doesn't help me any to know that it wouldn't actually be the rope for me."

"But if they have another prisoner—"

"I don't want to take any chances. If Jock were alive, he could tell the truth. He's dead and there's no one else who can tell it."

"I wonder how right you are," suggested Anne Purviance thoughtfully. "If he were alive and still wanted to fight foul, he might use this situation to grind you into submissiveness. It would be his testimony against yours. But since he's dead, there's no word except your own—and you'd be entitled to the benefit of the doubt."

"Leave it alone," pleaded Cynthia. "Don't stir it up. They don't know where I am now. I have no money, and lawyers cost money. Self-defense costs money. Wolf would be against me—everybody would be against me."

The woman whose hope of establishing a school here, a hope that had been so recently full of promise and that had crashed into sudden ruin, sat silent. This was all only a new chapter to an old story; the experience of seeing a splendid prospect blasted by unaccountable upflarings of the old, feudal spirit; of seeing hate coiled for striking just when the path seemed to smooth before one's feet. This little flapper, shrewd of mother wit and destitute of acquired knowledge, had been the unwitting cause.

No matter, the thing had happened, and like other things that had happened, it must be faced. Wade Murrail stood committed to this girl's defence and Anne herself acknowledged claims of stout sympathy.

"Perhaps," she said, "one thing at a time is enough. Right here on Little Flinty the situation is grave. Perhaps we had better leave the other ends loose until these ends are caught up and knotted."

Cynthia had been able to leave her bed to come out to the kitchen for supper that night, and there across the table she had seen Wade Murrell for the first time since her sight had wavered into giddiness, then darkness, in the schoolhouse.

Then, he had been a figure of whirling fury, bloodied, tattered and heaving of chest. Now, in corduroys and boots laced to the knees, in a hickory shirt open at the throat, but clean from the wash, he appeared a different man. His eyes met hers steadily, and his inquiries were perfunctorily considerate. Yet in her presence he was embarrassed, as if after such an experience he had no sure standards of conduct to guide his bearing or to point his etiquette.

When she had tried to eat and had succeeded only indifferently well, the girl felt that after all she was not yet ready to leave her bed for long, and with a murmured apology she arose. It seemed to her that both Aunt Erie and her son were relieved. It was almost as if these two were waiting for something to happen and preferred to be alone. Perhaps it had not been only a sense of diffidence that had given to the man's face that air of abstraction as he sat at his meal. Perhaps some graver preoccupation had been back of his silence.

At times she had felt that both the mother and the son had paused with their cups or their forks half raised, as if tensely listening. Although it was not yet quite dark, the heavy door stood closed and a lamp was lighted. Cynthia's quick eyes had not missed the fact that against the wall, within the sweep of Wade's arm, leaned a rifle—and that on its metal surfaces showed fresh oil.

Over the whole place had been an air of organized readiness, although no spoken word had referred to it, and now as she stood up to go to her own room again she fancied the other two felt relief—as if the

decks were being cleared of non-combatants—as if they were left the more unumbered for action.

In such a country, she told herself, and at such a time, danger came creeping with the night shadows, and here danger was being discounted with preparation.

Cynthia saw that some one had closed her own shutters, and her heart ached almost as much as her bruises—it ached with a weight of foreboding.

She could not see the stars now, but she could hear the whippoorwills and the frogs down along the creek bed—and as she had crossed the dog run she had seen that the young moon was riding in transparently clear skies.

She threw herself on her bed—and since she was alone here and beyond the need of maintaining a front of maidenly decorum, she lighted a cigarette. Until two days ago she had been an incessant smoker. For a time her mind flashed back to old haunts and old experiences; to the life that had been so ruthlessly cut short—to the man who had died.

Then she started at the sound of a deep-toned greeting from outdoors.

"Hello, thar, hit's Enoch Wade out hyar," sung out the voice. "Kin I come in?"

Almost instantly Murrell answered, but his response did not come from the kitchen where Cynthia had left him. Quick in her intuitive processes of stabbing at facts, the girl guessed what had happened. She had had her first hint of the coming of any visitor when she heard that uplifted voice, but Wade Murrell's quick senses had doubtless caught earlier and more distant warnings. Now he replied from the dog run, where doubtless he had been waiting in the blue-black shadow, as invisible as a ghost.

"Who's with ye, Enoch?" he challenged, and Enoch's answer came promptly: "Hit's jest me an' Covey Small."

Covey Small. Cynthia caught that last name with a wild flutter of fear at her heart. The surname was that of the young giant who had urged the mob on to her attack. Probably this was the father or the brother of the hulking bully she had seen this morningitching his wounded way out of

the schoolhouse. To Wade Murrell, too, the name evidently carried significance, for he gave a short, mirthless laugh.

"Come on in, both of ye," he invited shortly. "I was kinderly expectin' ter heer from Covey Small."

There was the opening and the closing of a heavy door with a murmur of voices, and then the girl, whose cigarette had died in her fingers, sat holding her breath while her pulses jumped. She might have known that such a thing as had happened this morning could not end without a sequel, and yet that did not soften the present shock of fear. What could any parent say in defence of a son who had proven himself such a degenerate young criminal as had Daws Small? And yet she could not help divining that this other Small had come in the hot spirit of indignation to demand an accounting.

She felt that in whatever scene was being played out beyond those walls she had a vital part, and yet she must stay here at the other end of the house, guessing all sorts of things, terrified—and in ignorance.

Perhaps it was ten minutes later—though each of them had lagged like an hour—when she heard the door open again, and again heard voices. Then she drank deep a grateful breath into her chest. So after all, they were leaving, and seemingly they were taking their departure in peace.

But outside the house the talk was resumed, and she could tell that the trio were standing under her own window. Some one was speaking slowly, and she recognized the voice that had called out in announcement of his coming.

"I 'lowed hit was seemlier," Enoch was saying, "ter finish up ther balance of what we hed ter say out hyar by ourselves. Hit didn't skeercely look ter be needful ter fret Aunt Erie with hit. Women folks air apt ter fly mad an' complicate matters."

"All right," agreed Wade Murrell brusquely. "Anywhar's ye've a mind ter talk, I'm ready ter hearken."

"Son," began the older man in a troubled fashion, "I've done sot inside thar an' listened ter you an' Covey an' now I wants ter say a word or two myself. Covey's my cousin by blood an' yourn, too. You're my

nephew—an' we're all Murrells tergither. Hit'd be a right sorrowful pity ef us Murrells was ter split asunder over a furtin' woman."

"Hit'd be a right sorrowful pity," came the quick retort, "ef us Murrells was ter split asunder because airy one of ye sought ter dictate ter Aunt Erie or me who we kin enjoy in our dwellin'-house—or because airy one of ye sought ter uphold a brash boy in seekin' ter do murder."

"Yes, that's God's truth." Again it was Enoch speaking with guarded self-command. "When yore pappy died an' ye stepped inter his shoes es head of ther Murrells, men suffered ye ter lead an' counsel 'em because ye'd done a'ready proved yoreself. I hain't gainsayin' none that ye've done kept ther truce—an' ye've done held folks tergither fer peace an' law an' uprightness when hit was kinderly like herdin' wild sheep ter do hit. I've got ther heart an' cravin' ter see ye go on ther same way. Ef ye don't, then God, He knows what blood-lettin' may come ter plague us all—but still ye kain't go on leadin' ef yore own folks ceases ter confidence ye."

"Ef ther Murrells quits confidencin' me fer aimin' to protect them that's visitors under my roof," the response was dangerously soft, "then I reckon they'll jedgmatically hev ter quit."

"Nobody hain't seekin' ter dictate ter ye, son," the older man reminded him. "But thars done been some counsel held amongst us elders—an' I mout es well p'int-blank tell ye ther amount of hit. I don't come hyar jest fer myself. I comes from some, siv'ral other Murrells—all prudent, thoughted men. They bids me ter ask ye some two-three right plain questions."

"What air they, Enoch? I reckon I kin give right plain answers back ter 'em."

"Fust-offly, what does ye know yoreself erbout this hyar furrin' woman save only what she tells ye?"

"I knows enough ter confidence her."

"Because of outright knowledge or jest on yore own judgment?"

"I stands on my own judgment. Hain't that enough?"

"No, son, I misdoubts hit hain't. Leastways not fer some. Second-offly, then I'll put

hit at ye another way. Ye says ye vouches ter her. Air ye willin' ter wed with her? Ef so be ye did thet, no man couldn't handily say nairy other word."

Wade Murrell's voice came again, and to the girl who stood behind her heavy shutters an unseen auditor, it had a ring of finality that seemed to slam the door on any hope of conciliation.

"No, I don't aim ter wed with her fer two right ample reasons. I didn't fotch her hyar because I was sweetheartin' her, an' moreover I reckon—"

He paused, then added in a changed tone: "I reckon thet ter her manner of thinkin' I hain't skeercely nothin' more then a clod of dirt under her feet."

"Fer why should ye be a clod of dirt ter her thinkin'?" There was fierce racial pride and the truculence of challenge in the question. "Be there airy better folks anywhere than what us Murrells be?"

"No, I reckon not, Enoch; but yit all folks don't know thet. Folks down below accounts us mounting men ter be right ign'rant hill-billies."

Once more there was a freighted silence out there except for the plaintive call of a whippoorwill, and after that came the voice of the uncle, low of pitch but trembling with indignation.

"All right, then. I reckon us Murrells kain't handily yield our jedgment no longer ter a man thet sots sich leetle store by his self or by his kith an' kin es that. I'm right sore hearted, Wade, but I reckon we've got a bound ter look elsewhere fer a man ter head us an' counsel us."

So the break had come. They had, thought Cynthia, cast him out after acknowledging him since his boyhood, and because of her. She wanted to go out there and plead for the leader they were repudiating; for the pilot they were putting overside. But she knew that would be fatal. The sight of her would inflame their passions.

Wade, too, was silent for a moment, then his voice leaped.

"All right. Look elsewhars an' be damned," he challenged, but almost at once he swallowed his gorge and his voice changed. "An' yit holt on a minute," he added, half in warning and half in pleading.

"Belike we've all done spoke too hasty on both sides of this argymint. Afore we parts in wrath, this fashion, tarry whar ye be a minute. I've got need ter pray."

The girl turned from the window with a sob in her throat and walked unsteadily to the low chair. There she sat bent over while her heart jumped crazily and the color ran out of her face.

After what seemed an age, she heard Wade Murrell's voice again.

It began slowly, guardedly, but in its earnestness was a throb like the distant roll of drums.

"Men," he said, "hit behoves us ter recollect how this hyar Murrell-Skidmore war commenced, an' hit behoves us ter take forethought of what pestilence lays ahead ef so be hit should break out afresh. God, He knows I hain't got no master itch ter be accounted no leader of ther Murrells. God knows I ruther let some other man heft up ther hardships of keepin' hot-heads cool. Ter my notion no man hain't fit ter lead nohow thet takes self-pride an' glorification in ther job. Ter my notion ther only man thet's fit ter lead other men is one thet holds hisself ther slave of them he leads an' puts them others ahead of hisself. I'm right willin' ter step back an' quit—but—"

He paused and his two hearers waited in silence. The grave knowledge lingered with them that leaders with inherent ability can not be raised up at will; that in this man's stead there was no other of equal power or approximate keen-sightedness; none so free from self-seeking or egotism.

"But," went on Wade soberly, "ef so be I hain't called on ter quit, I kain't be called on ter belie my own jedgment neither. So hit comes down ter this: I quits, or I aims ter be duly hearkened to. I quits, or them that's under my roof dwells thar safe from affront, an' thet's my final word, save only one thing more."

"We'd love right well ter hear thet one thing more, Wade," said his Uncle Enoch anxiously, hoping against hope for a belated note of compromise.

"Hit's a thing thet hain't ter go no further then jest you two men, though," the young clan chieftain cautioned them. "I could right handily call ther Coates an'

Wades an' Smalls an' all ther balance of ther Murrells tergither an' make 'em jest one outright speech—an' they'd go away from that meetin' stronger in th'ar confidence fer me then what they ever was afore. But I hain't ergoin' ter do that.

"I hain't ergoin' ter do hit because despite ther fact that *I'd* be master solid with 'em, they'd go straight away from thar bilin' with that fashion of wrath that leads on ter warfarin' an' bloodshed. Thet's what I've always done sought ter sarcumvent an' that's why ye've got ter hold yore counsel erbout what I tells ye now. Does ye both give me yore hands in pledge ter hold what I says secret?"

Cynthia, behind her blinds, heard no answer, but she supposed they had nodded their solemn affirmation of the compact, for Murrell went on again.

"This hyar whole commotion erginst this woman—an' I believes she's as decent as yore own women—was stirred up by Lesher Skidmore. He went erbout hit right crafty-wise. He didn't cast no slurs hisself, but he seed ter hit that ther Murrells cast 'em. He aimed ter split us Murrells apart an' ter sunder our blood-ties—so he could lay-way me without bein' held ter account. He aimed ter compass his own vengeance through my own kith an' kin, an' afore God, hit looks right sensibly like ye all swallered his bait—hook, line an' sinker."

"Lesher Skidmore! Afore God A'mighty —ef that's so—"

"Hold on thar Uncle Enoch. Thar ye goes gittin' hot in thar collar. Ye sees now how less-thoughted men would fly mad, ef I give that story our ter each an' every?" He paused and into his voice came the tincture of infinite hate.

"Betwixt Lesher an' me thar stands a score ter sottle that kain't be nowise sottilled save by death—but him an' me both, we aims ter bide our time twell we kin meet without we causes ther truce ter bust. Leastways, I'm bidin' my time, an' him—he's seekin' ter hev ther Murrells pull his chestnuts outen ther ember-coals fer him."

Again out there a silence fell, and again a whippoorwill broke it. Finally, Cynthia heard Enoch Wade speaking once more in deep-toned gravity.

"Wade," he said soberly, "I hain' nuver ceased ter confidence ye my own self. What ye says, hit's a lavish ter satisfy me—but by yore own tellin' we kain't go back an' give ther whole gist of hit ter them that deputized us. They sont us hyar ter lay down kinderly final terms. Them terms was ter wed ther gal—or send her away—or else ther Murrells aimed ter spit yore counsel outen thar mouths. Like es not they 'lows that gittin' ter be a rich man has done changed ye. I'm farin' back thar ter reason with them shaller-witted fools—an' ef thar's a bust up I stands solid with *you*, but right sorely I mistrusts ther outcome."

"Wed ther gal—or send her away." That was the ultimatum. To Cynthia, sitting there in her room, all the rest of the talk seemed swallowed up in that.

In a few days life had taken the metal of her being and played upon it blasts from a merciless forge, heating it red. Then life had held her, molten, between anvil and sledge. Perhaps it had already refashioned her a little, or perhaps she was responding to one of those brief, dramatic impulses that come to the thetic minded.

At all events, she arose unsteadily from her chair. She could not let them dethrone Wade Murrell on her account. She would go out there and give an answer to the ultimatum she had heard. She would promise these men to go away. Going away meant prison—possibly death—but that was her own funeral. It seemed that staying here meant ruin for her protector—possibly a fresh eruption of assassinations and the making of widows and orphans.

"It's up to me," she groaned, "This time I've got to come through."

Quietly she let herself out of her door, and then stood leaning weakly against the sill, in the blotting indigo shadow that hung along that side of the dog run.

Out there beyond, as she looked off, the night-scape was a wondrous thing of silver light from a moon of almost calcium brightness. A world of illuminated silver lay over against an emphasis of cobalt shadows, and a few feet away stood the three men, starkly and boldly outlined in that light like figures cut from granite.

Now on the threshold of her dramatic

moment, resolved to offer herself as the needful sacrifice, Cynthia, who had always been weakly selfish and full of self pity, leaned panting against the wall, her nails biting into her palms. She was bracing herself—and for the moment she hung back hesitant and breathless.

She edged forward until she stood almost within arm's length of the trio, still obliterated in the inkiness of shadow, but while her own thoughts and doubts had obsessed her, she must have missed something of the talk. Now, she was conscious that another voice was speaking—one that she had not heard before. That must be Covey Small.

"I hain't gainsayin', Wade," declared the voice, "thet my boy's done give me a passel of trouble—he's done been a disable, shiftless kind of a boy an' from time ter time he's done got hisself inter scrapes—but still he hain't nuthin' but a boy—an' I don't skeercely low thar's no *real* harm in him."

"He's nigh ernough a man ter stand es tall an' weigh es much es I does, Covey," answered Wade Murrell stiffly. "An' thar's enough real harm in him fer him ter seek ter gang-murder a helpless woman."

"She war a woman he'd done heered his elders belittle fer a wanton, Wade—not but what all he heered mout be lies."

"She's a woman my maw an' me hes done vouched fer, Covey. Whoso belittled her, belittled us, likewise. Does ye aim ter do thet, too?"

The other man spoke hastily.

"I reckon ye knows I doesn't, Wade."

"All right, then. I cotched this boy of yourn in a manner of wickedness thet sought ter do murder. I caught him red-fisted an' I punished him—less sorely than his rightful deserts. I did ther like fer Jake Carmichael an' I stands by what I done."

"I wanted ter hear yore side of ther story, Wade, afore I plumb made up my mind. That's what I come hyar fer ter-night."

"You've done heered it, Covey. Now I aims ter tell ye somethin' else." Murrell was speaking in a tone of deadly resoluteness. "Ef so be ye kain't manage yore boy—ef he's a boy ter ther amount thet he

kin escape a man's punishment an' yit a man ter ther amount thet he kin go 'round half murderin' women-folks—then either him or me hes got ter leave these mountings—an' I aims ter stay."

That ultimatum carried on the clear night air like a bugle call, and after it there was a long and painful silence. Then, while Cynthia braced herself as one does for a high dive, there flashed from the black cloak of the hillside a sudden spurt of flame with a thunderous roar of sound in its wake, and Wade Murrell's hat went spinning from his head.

Instantly Wade's hand swept to his arm-pit and his pistol glinted in the white light. At the same moment Covey Small took off his hat and wheeled to face the laurel thicket. "Stop thet!" he bellowed. "What damn foolery air this? Quit hit, I say!"

But the trance that had held Cynthia was broken. She had flung herself as a screen in front of Wade Murrell and her voice sounded thin and agitated. "This is my show," she cried out. "If you've got to assassinate somebody—shoot me! I'm the Jonah, shoot me!"

CHAPTER XV.

"FAMISHED FER HER!"

THE sight of that slight figure, appearing with such abruptness out of the darkness, and the sound of that new voice, intervening in a counsel so closely guarded, came with almost as much impact of surprise as had the roar of attempted murder from the hillside—a roar whose broken echoes still rolled and grumbled through the timbered slopes.

Possibly it was more surprising, for the shot from ambush was an old and familiar manifestation—but the uninvited bursting of a "fotched-on" woman into clan affairs of life and death was without precedent.

As Cynthia had leaped between her protector and his would-be assassin, some instinct had driven Covey Small forward with the same intent, and now two human bodies stood masking the one that waited with a drawn weapon in its hand. These two standing shoulder to shoulder were the

woman, whose coming had brought storm, and the man, whose son had stoned her.

"This is my show," the girl made vehement declaration again, her words coming with the rush of a cascade. "This trouble started because of me, and I'm no quitter. I came out here to tell you men that I'll go away. You can carry that message back with you.

"Nobody warned me before I started that a woman couldn't come into your Kentucky mountains without being mobbed and stirring up a bunch of murders. I thought you welcomed innocent strangers. Well, I know better now.

"Wade Murrell treated me decently, and because of that you talk of throwing him overboard—you're firing out the one man amongst you who can think of other people ahead of himself; and out there in the bushes some low-lived dog is taking pot-shots at him while he stands here in the moonlight talking to supposed friends! All right, I'll get out!"

She broke off abruptly from the passionate utterance which had leaped almost without conscious volition from her lips, and stood there hot-eyed and panting with her breast defiantly presented to the ambushed hill. Fear had gone utterly out of her and only a scathing indignation remained.

It was Enoch who spoke next, and he did not speak to her.

"Edge back thar inter ther shadder, Wade," he ordered. "Covey, you keep betwixt him an' ther hillside whilst he goes."

Enoch Wade's pistol, too, lay ready in his hand, and while he talked his eyes were searching the woods, but he himself did not stir from his place in the brightness of the moon.

Wade Murrell had not heeded the command to retreat. He was seeking to shove Cynthia gently aside with his left hand as his right, armed with its pistol, came up, but Enoch spoke again urgently, swiftly.

"Do what I bids ye, Wade," he entreated. "Git in ther shadder. Don't suffer yore heedlessness ter peril us all. We kain't handily desert ye—an' ther man that shot ther shoot, he hain't above slayin' a woman."

As if he, too, were waking out of a trance,

Wade Murrell uttered a low ejaculation of self-reproach and swept the girl backward, with a single gesture of his free arm, into the shadow, then less hurriedly he followed her. It was not the thought that he had been fired on that seemed now to claim the taut focusing of his attention as he stood there, like a man paralyzed, in the full of the dangerous light. It is doubtful whether any fully realized thought of the physical danger had emerged in his mind from a welter of other matters that engaged it. His standing stock-still had been calculated—until the reminder came that others were sharing his peril.

Even now, when both Cynthia and himself were invisible, those two other figures still remained exposed. Enoch Wade gave back deliberately, but strangely enough Covey Small seemed to be seeking the strongest light and to be standing unnaturally straight with his face uplifted to catch the silver effulgence, and his features were turned direct toward the laurel from which had come the echo-rousing jet of flame.

It was only a matter of moments, and the blue-black slope did not speak again, nor did any weapon here by the house speak back in retort.

Then from behind the closed door of the dog run came Aunt Erie's voice, muted but self-possessed.

"Slip along in ther shadder," she directed, "I'll open ther back door fer ye. Is airy person burted?"

To Cynthia, the few moments that had been so compact with events had also been full of mystery. Something had been going on in the minds of these three men which she had not fathomed—something that had caused Wade Murrell, the consummate woodsman, to stand like a wooden Indian instead of taking instant cover—something which had impelled Covey Small to act as if he were deliberately and rather hopefully courting death.

In those few instants, too, she had had time to catch back something of her own mental balance. Perhaps she had only made more trouble by intruding on that scene—and her appearance had been Valkyrielike when she had been cautioned above all to maintain a quiet and maidenly demeanor.

If she had another chance she must strive to efface that hurtful impression.

These thoughts went flashingly through her mind as the four figures slid in a silent cue along the narrow bar of shadow, turned the chinked corner of the house and entered its main room from the rear.

There, inside, was yellow lamplight and Aunt Erie stood stiffly waiting.

Covey Small went over to a chair and dropped heavily into it. His face was stamped with an expression of acute suffering which he was making no effort to dissemble, and in Wade Murrell's pupils glowered the darkness of a grim preoccupation.

For a little space it seemed that no one wished to be first to break the silence, and when Enoch Wade assumed the rôle of spokesman he took up the task heavy heartedly.

"I reckon thar hain't no use ter make no idle pretenses, Covey," he said. "I reckon we all seed right plain what ye had hit in head ter do out thar. We kin make a right shrewd guess fer why ye doffed yore hat an' showed yore face ter ther la'rel—fer why ye raised up yore voice so quick an' clear—fer why ye stood thar stock still with yore features turned up ter ther moon-sparkle."

He paused, and there was no answer. The man in the chair appeared to bend lower as if years had been all at once added to the weight of age on his shoulders, and the speaker went on, forcing his words gravely:

"Ye reeco'nized thet hit warn't no Skidmore layin' out thar—hid in ther bresh with a rifle-gun, Covey—Ye reeco'nized the right likely whosoever hit war, he wouldn't seek ter shoot at *you*—I hed thar same notion, too—Thet's why I tarried a minute—ter make sure."

Covey Small came to his feet with an effort. His voice was tortured.

"Es God jedges me," he expostulated. "I don't know naught more—for dead sure—than what either one of *you* knows! Es God jedges me, I don't!"

"No, Covey," the answer was sober, and as Enoch made it, Wade Murrell stood silent with folded arms and a troubled face.

"No right-thoughted man wouldn't suspicion ye of a dastardly thing like that. But yit we could see what ye suspicioned. We couldn't holp seein' hit."

"Ye've done contended yore boy didn't hev no real harm in him—yit when thet shoot was shot—ye periled yore own life ter stand out thar betwixt Wade an' ther gun—Yore suspicion was strong enough fer thet—an' ye sought ter protect each one from t'other."

"Ef so be hit war anybody else save only yore own boy, ye tuck a right gay chanst of dyin' when ye jumped out thar an' stood like a livin' target-board—Ye hed thet much suspicion, seems like."

Covey Small had no words for reply. He only groaned again.

"We kin see ye're right sore-hearted, Covey," went on Enoch, "an' so be we. Atter all we don't know fer dead sartain-sure thet hit was Daws layin' out thar seekin' ter slay Wade—We don't know it—an' yit we don't know naught ter contrary thet mistrust—an' we kin see hit's a mistrust ye shares yore own self."

He drew himself up and turned his face toward his nephew.

"I'm still holdin' ye ter be ther head man of ther Murrells, Wade," he said, "but seein' es how this shoot was shot at *you*, I'm shiftin' this matter ter my own shoulders?" Wade nodded silently, and in a tone of judgment his uncle continued: "We hain't a goin' ter seek no evidence erginst yore boy, Covey—an' we knows thar hain't no man livin' more plumb trustworthy than what ye be yore own self. So we looks ter ye ter run this matter down an' handle hit fer us. Ye're ther one body thet kin compass hit—an' ef ye finds thet hit was Daws thet shot thet shoot, then Daws has got ter go away—an' stay away. We passes hit right up ter you with full trust an' confidence."

Covey Small moved forward. The tall figure that had been as self-reliant and statuesque as that of a sagamore out there, when he faced the hidden rifle, moved now with a shambling uncertainy of nerve and muscle, but his eyes were as grateful as a dog's.

"Hit's es much es I kin rightfully ask,"

he said with stark simplicity. Then with a resolute effort, he turned to Cynthia, who stood at the edge of the lamplight.

"Ma'am," he said, "we come hyar with one notion of ye. Now we've done seed ye—an' we goes away with another. Ye 'lowed out thar that ye'd heered women-folks was safe among us. I've always heered that, too—Thar be some half witted folk that browbeats witch-women an' lewd wenches—but even sich women as them, ther balance of us jest warns away." He paused and wiped the cold sweat of agitation from his face on the sleeve of his coat.

"These boys that flung rocks at ye—I reckon they was dunces—but still they brought down shame on us all. I reckon my boy, he kinderly swep' 'em offen thar feet an' egged 'em on—but I've done seed ye standin' betwixt ther man that befriended ye an' death. I aims ter sot ye right with folks. Thet hain't no more then yore rightful due—I aims ter tell hit ye've done been lied erbout—an' I looks ter see good folks ask yore pardon—I reckon ye don't need ter go away after all."

"Thanks lots," murmured Cynthia Meade. It was genuine feeling for this distressed old man that suddenly misted her eyes and softened her voice, but the tears and the light of pity made those young eyes starry. She had promised to play a part here; the part of demure simplicity, of disarming ingenuousness, and now she felt, with an unaccountable sincerity, that it was a part she would like to make real. She didn't want to act it. She wanted to be it.

As she stood there, a few minutes after she had thrown herself before Wade Murrell, she was a slight and appealing picture in which the Amazonian fires had been quenched into aspects that were all soft and feminine. There was not only physical beauty in her and about her, but winsomeness as well.

"Thanks lots," she said again. "I want to stay—but I seem to bring too much trouble."

"She hain't a goin' away, nowhars," announced Wade Murrell sharply, "save only when she goes of her own free will—an'

she's a goin' ter tarry hyar twell folks takes back thar lies an' eats thar slurs. I've done been defied an' I don't low ter submit."

Cynthia looked swiftly about the little circle of faces, and they were all now the faces of friends. Once more she spoke, and her words came impulsively.

"Please forgive me for putting in my oar out there without being asked. I saw I was the cause of this trouble and all I came out to say, was that I'd go away. Then the shot came and I got excited—You're dead right when you say there are no better people in the world than the Murrells—Nobody was ever so good to me before."

Enoch Wade had been looking, too, at the slight figure, and it seemed to him that she was a delicate and fragile vessel to have held and poured out such a militant contempt for danger as he had seen out there under the white moon. Mountain women might have shown such a spirit, but with it would have gone a stoic hardness of bearing. This girl had, to the eye that studied her, the softness of flowers, and her green eyes were demurely downcast—and teary-misted.

A genuine, almost tremulous, diffidence assailed her, and a belated weakness swept her after a day that had been so full of unaccustomed violence. She swayed a little on her feet and moved to lean for support against the stones of the fireplace.

"Nobody hyar hain't faultin' ye fer what ye done, gal," Enoch assured her gravely. "I don't see aught in ye that hain't plumb maidenly—an' I aims ter say so master plain ter all men—but ye've done been through a wicked hard day—I reckon ye're plum tuckered out. Ef I was you, fer some siv'ral days ter come, I wouldn't do nothin' but jest easy, settin'-down work."

Cynthia Meade, the softly-speaking, modest-mannered country maiden! Sometimes in those next few days that followed, the girl would think of her old companions and, in imagination, she could hear their ribald laughter at such a picture. She

could fancy ironic, derisive amusement darting in the eyes of Jock Harrison had those eyes been still quick with life. Although those eyes, which would open no more, had looked on her lightly as a plaything, still as the days passed, they haunted her more and more.

Here, just now, in the wholesome quietness of the old log house, there was a lull of tranquillity, but she knew that it might be only the deceptive calm that goes before storm.

In the hills roundabout, where dwelt families of a dozen surnames, but all Murrells by clan adherence, two spirits were combatively at work and the outcome belonged to the future. Strong men like Enoch Wade and Covey Small were preaching with deep-hearted earnestness that to break away from the guidance of Wade Murrell would be to make of the clan a scattered herd without a watch dog. It would leave them ripe for devastating attack of enemy wolves united in a predatory, close-knit pack.

Another spirit, infected by the virus of early slander, clung obdurately to its first impression and fretted. That spirit insisted that Wade Murrell, the pious, had imported and was living in sin with a painted Jezebel, a strumpet, a woman without shame, a pariah in petticoats. It asserted that righteousness had gone out of him and his leadership was dead. The elements that had chased most impatiently against keeping the truce, the elements that had leaned in willful stubbornness toward lawlessness were now the elements that raised hands in holy horror at this alleged affront to civic virtue.

But as yet that fermentation was all beneath the surface, and to outward seeming the community was in repose.

In that time, Cynthia found herself thinking constantly of Jock Harrison, and she bitterly accused herself. In fleeing without even pausing to cover the face of the murdered man, she had been a yellow quitter, a human rat, everything that her code despised.

Yet she shudderingly realized that under such wild spurring of terror she could have done nothing else. She could not open the

locked door of death. In life, the man had not been recklessly generous himself.

Still, now that he was gone, and she stood in the seeming of his assassin, she could not help remembering those qualities in him that had laid so strong a spell upon her. In her own fashion she was mourning for him.

"Thar's a goin' ter be a frolic—a kindly dancin' party come Satiddy night over ter Murrell Coates's," announced Aunt Erie one day. "Me an' Wade, we aimed ter tote ye over thar fer ther fun."

"Do you think I'd better go?" inquired the girl dubiously. "I'm not in such awful good standing with some of the people that will be there, am I?"

"Thet's fer why we 'lowed ye'd better aim ter go," the older woman told her decisively. "We don't seek ter let folks opine we're ashamed of ye—an' moreover Wade, he sots master store by facin' things out plumb straight-eyed. He says thet that hain't but one body that's done seed ye face ter face that hain't come right round ter be yore friend—an' thet one body's Lesher Skidmore. He won't be at no Murrell frolic."

The girl's gray-green eyes clouded apprehensively. Out of those eyes had gone much of the self-sufficient flippancy of a week or two ago. Into them had come the new-born seriousness of one who is beginning to question many shallow concepts hitherto accepted without challenge.

"Of course, I'll go if you think I'd better," she said. "But I don't expect to get much kick out of it—unless it's the back-kick of being scared green."

"When ye gits thar an' heers ther fiddles scrapin'," Aunt Erie assured her. "ye'll feel anticky enough, I'll be bound. Ye're young an' hit's in nature fer young gals ter feel gayly at a frolic."

It was in a "jolst wagon" that they drove those stony miles to the house of Murrell Coates.

To Cynthia Stokes, despite her fears and despite the fact that Wade Murrell had sat on the driver's box throughout the trip in an unbroken taciturnity, the entrance upon that scene was like entrance into a

new sort of theater. To a mind so unaccustomed to it, this whole pioneer 'conception of social entertainment was picturesque to the edge of melodrama. Her mind flashed back to some of the studio parties she had not so long ago attended with Jock Harrison.

Here the demijohn of white liquor with its tin dipper, at the door, promised a general "friskin' of sperits" and it was a prospect which frightened the girl a little. Social drinking had never alarmed her before.

She found a house of logs with few rooms and a roar of fire in a cavern of stone— Firelight fell fantastically on guests, who, with no intent at masquerade, came as if they were humorously costumed for a "tacky party." Her eyes had a confused picture of boisterous rusticity—girls in turkey red with bare feet, patriarchs with snowy beards, youths with leering features and eyes already bloodshot.

The puncheon floors were cleared for dancing, and men and women, lacking chairs enough, lay promiscuously about on the four-poster beds that nestled back into every corner. Over it all sounded the whining of fiddles and "dulcimores," and permeating it all was the hale vulgarity of the men and the women who live remote from rails and wires, and who in privation, sometimes in starvation, refuse to relinquish their right to the floundering pursuit of happiness.

It seemed to Cynthia that from every shadow eyes peered at her with silent hostility, yet no voice spoke to her which was not a voice of welcome.

Night fell. Outside one heard the shouts of young men drinking in the star light. Inside the fiddles had begun to sing, and on the puncheon floor heavy feet in brogans and light feet that were bare scraped and shuffled.

There was no waltz, no one-step—only the cavorting romp of old square dances—the "running of sets" as the thing had been done in the England of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Out on the floor stood a crude comedian, grotesquely posturing as he called the figures. On the tide of fiddle music rode the

scrape and rumble of feet and the shout of laughter as he declaimed his orders: " Swing yore pardners—sasshay through. Step light, ladies, on ther ballroom flo', Don't mind yore legs ef yore garters don't show."

It was a lurid Saturnalia. Through its yellow light leaped and waned, human voices shot shrilly up and dropped abruptly down. Outside a prematurely drunken youth expressed the joy of life in a Rebel yell.

Cynthia, looking quietly on, half afraid, saw Wade Murrell at the edge of the festivity always watching her from the distance, as some great dog might have watched his master's child. At length, when the heat and the reek of the place had made her a little faint, she slipped out of the door and stood alone under the stars.

After a little she looked around and there was Wade Murrell standing near her. He had come without sound, and a shaft of orange light from the door touched his face and showed it stonily set. His arms were folded and his fingers bit into his biceps as if seeking to throttle too wild a leaping of his blood.

"A penny for your thoughts, Wade Murrell," challenged the girl, but she spoke softly and with no trace of the calculated impudence that had customarily proclaimed itself in her manner of utterance not long ago.

The man turned his face slowly toward her, and in it she read an unexplained suffering. The eyes had blazed and the lips parted. Then the eyes quenched their fire and the lips closed. After a moment, he said dully:

"Sometimes I wonders whether anything that goes on inside my head kin rightly be called thoughts."

"Is that why all the Murrells look to you for guidance?" she questioned gently.

He threw back his head contemptuously.

"Among ign'rant folks," he said bitterly, "hit don't take no master brains ter look smart—an' moreover hit waits ter be seen whether they does look ter me any more." Then with a change of tone he asked: "Why hain't ye dancin', Cynthia?"

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"I don't know these dances," she answered. "Why aren't you?" "I don't hold hit godly," he said. "Albeit I hain't got no cavil with others ther does."

She laid a hand on his arm and felt a spasmodic tremor go through the tautened muscles.

"Is something troubling you?" she asked.

"Naught that kin be holped," he answered shortly.

"Nothing that I can help?"

"No, naught that anybody kin holp— you least of all." There was an almost ferocious note in his voice, and Cynthia, after looking at him searchingly for a moment, said: "I think I'll go back and watch the dance."

She turned, and as she walked to the

house, he started impulsively forward as if to follow and stop her, then he caught himself and clenched his fists more spasmodically, but his gaze went hungrily along with her. When she had disappeared inside the door, the man wheeled and blundered, with none of his cat-footed lightness of step, to the black shadow of the laurel. He let his head drop in to his crossed forearms, and his voice came brokenly:

"I hain't nuver hungered fer a woman afore," he told himself vehemently. "Seems like she kin make me ache throughout my body an' soul— Seems like I'm plumb famished fer her— Ther longin' fer her parches my throat—an' I knows right well hit won't nowise do!"

He gripped his face in his hands and his chest heaved as if with the hot strain of an emotion near to the bursting point.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



THE LONG TRAIL

Give me a pipe with a chunk of tobaccy,
A gun for my shoulder, a road and a dog,
And I'll envy no man, be he Crœsus or Cæsar,
While I hike through the woodlands and rest on a log.

There's the stars in the ev'nin' a twinklin' above you,
The moon in its orbit adrift in the sky,
And a big slice of bacon in th' fryin' pan sizzlin'—
Oh, who's more content in the world then than I?

Let the coyote sit wailin' the fate of the trail's end,
For the bacon is sizzlin', the spring's bubbling clear,
And at dawn there'll be plenty of sunshine to cheer me,
And partridges rustlin' and fleet-footed deer.

Oh, the trail, oh, the trail, it is winding and twisting,
It is turning and changing, and leading me on
To the valleys and meadows beyond the still mountains,
To the grass and the clover, where I'll be anon!

Let me fill up my pipe, place my gun on my shoulder,
And whistle a tune, with my dog at my side;
And I'll follow the trail that I always have followed,
Till my time comes to leave it and cross the Divide.

Frederick Schenck Schlesinger



"Man Coming Out"

By L. PAUL

"THE only thing I can't see," said Whitey Wilkins, "the only thing that worries me, is how the devil a man can get out of here in a hurry. Them's long miles, eighty o' them, between here and that trading post, Fort Peril, long enough by water now, but a damn sight longer afoot once winter comes. And me, I don't hanker to step 'em off in a hurry, no how."

Big Bateese laughed. "You don' need for go mak' call," he replied. "We stay all winter here. In the spring w'en the ice go, we put the canoe on the water, and, voila, in three day we come on Fort Peril."

"But what if a man gets sick?" Whitey persisted. "I know I'm green at this stuff, but last year, even though it was my first in the bush, we were near Trail's End, and you had dogs. This year we're 'way up in new country, and there's neither dog nor toboggan nearer than the fort. And in another two weeks the river 'll freeze up tighter than hell, and—well, there you are, and that's that."

Bateese opened the door of their log

cabin, a small structure which they had just completed in the center of their new trapping grounds at Elbow Bend on the Range River.

"No toboggan?" said he, grinning. "Me, I see him for sure."

Whitey Wilkins peered out; saw the still water of the river, the tree lined banks, and nothing more.

"Where do you see a toboggan?" he asked.

Bateese stepped out, laid his hand on the trunk of a small birch. "Here," he said.

Whitey looked doubtful. "You ain't goin' to clap a hand on them rocks by the shore and call them dogs, are you?" he asked. "Oh, I know you could take a jack-knife and build a city out o' things that grows, but dogs! Well, you won't find them so easy, Bateese."

"W'en we want, we find. Maybe we find two, t'ree later on, w'en we want dogs."

Bateese picked up a short cross-cut saw which lay against the wall of the cabin. He had bought it at the trading post, to

the great amusement of Whitey Wilkins. For Whitey had figured that a real, honest-to-goodness trapper would be above such a tool, would depend on his ax. All the trappers Whitey had read about had been the ax sort. However, when it came to building the cabin, Whitey admitted that a cross-cut saw had its uses.

"I t'ink we mak' toboggan now," Bateese stepped up to the birch, notched the trunk with the ax, then took up the saw.

Whitey grabbed hold of one handle. "Nothin' like bein' forehanded," he said, "but me, I don't see the use. A toboggan is a fine thing for travelin' when you have the means o' draggin' it by dogflesh, but standin' ornamental ag'in' the wall it looks sort o' superfluous."

"Nevaire you min', Whitey." Bateese bent his great back as he drew the cross-cut across the trunk of the birch. "Jus' now we'll have toboggan an' no dogs, but later on—how you say it?—the proverb, 'Don' you swim over dose bridges till you come up wit' hims.'"

They dropped the birch, a small tree with a trunk that promised straight grain. Bateese measured eight feet off the lower end and cut it through again. The log thus formed, he squared roughly with his ax, a delicate job even for as expert an axman as he, for the grain was not true, though good for birch, and the wood was brittle. Finally across the end he marked off his planks, allowing almost an inch thickness for each. The cross-cut saw would dress them down, he figured.

"Now we play sawmill," Bateese said, and once more grabbed the cross-cut.

They started their cut slowly. The saw, meant for working across the grain, cut rather poorly along it. But, at that, when they had finished their first rude plank, the result was gratifying. Rough it was, but straight, five inches wide, about half an inch thick, and eight feet long.

"We ain't a fancy sawmill, Bateese," Whitey crowed, "but that there board's a board."

"We cut anodder," Bateese laughed. "I t'ink we mak' skis, too."

They went to work again. By night they

had eight planks of a sort. Bateese laid aside the four best for skis. The others he took into the cabin.

With the ax he dressed them down a bit, cutting off the rough surfaces left by the cross-cut saw. Then breaking a bottle, he smoothed them still more with bits of broken glass. When finally they were finished to suit he had four thin strips of birch which, laid side by side, would give him a toboggan eight feet long and perhaps twenty inches wide.

"That don't look like the toboggan you had last year," Whitey objected as his big partner, laying the strips on the floor, side by side, began to nail a batten across one end. "That there thing ain't got a curve in front. It 'd do on hard goin', mebbe, but it 'd nose-dive into the first drift you run across, and not all the dogs in this here north country would get it out."

Bateese said nothing. He liked to exhibit his woodcraft to this new partner of his, liked to see Whitey's eyes widen as he found the way round each new obstruction. So he went on stolidly with his work, nailing the first batten across almost at the ends of the thin strips of birch, nailing a second two feet farther back. The ends of these battens he left projecting an inch or so on either side. Another batten midway along and one at the other end and this stage of toboggan manufacture was over.

Bateese rose. "Mak' hot fire, Whitey," he ordered. "An' boil water."

"What do you want hot water for?" Whitey asked.

"For mak' the wood sof'. Then we bend heem."

Bateese picked up the toboggan and stepped outside. After putting the water on to heat Whitey followed him.

The big Canuck was standing by two small saplings—straight stemmed, perhaps a foot apart, springing from a common root. He slid the front end of his toboggan between them, and tested it, putting the strain on easily. But the toboggan was stiff, the wood brittle. However, he found out what he wanted. The trees would serve. He could use them as a template.

He went back into the cabin, rummaged around, and came out again with an old

woolen shirt. This he wrapped around the forward end of the toboggan, lashing it tightly in place.

"Water's boilin'," Whitey reported. "You goin' to do the week's wash?"

"Bring heem," Bateese grinned. "Bring queeck!"

He seized the pot of hot water and poured it over the shirt until it was soaking.

"So that's it?" Whitey was quick to see things, once he had the clew. "No chance to stick that there wood into the water, so you stick the water onto the wood, eh?"

"For sure." Bateese watched as the steam rose from the shirt. "For one, maybe two hour we drop water on dis toboggan. An' den, w'en the wood she get sof' an' wet, we bend between dose tree."

An hour later he unloosened the old shirt, and tried the wood with his thumbnail.

"I t'ink perhaps maybe she ben' now," he reported.

They lifted the toboggan up, inserted the forward end between the two saplings, and began to bend. The end bore against the inner side of the left sapling. Slowly, watching carefully lest he crack the wood, Bateese bent the back end around till, at a point two feet from the front, the toboggan began to shape around the second sapling which stood to the right.

"Hol' heem—lak dat!" he commanded suddenly.

"What's wrong?" Whitey asked as he obeyed. But as he took hold he understood. "This don't bend any too easy," he cried. "It's all I can do to hold it."

"Dat's for why." Bateese ran into the cabin and came out with more hot water. He wrapped the old shirt around the toboggan once more, spilled boiling water over it. Then waited, wetting the shirt again from time to time. "Now I t'ink she go," he reported at length, and took hold again.

This time they completed the curve, bringing the back end of the toboggan around the second tree.

Bateese looked things over for the last time. "By gar," said he, "I t'ink she is mak' for sure, Whitey."

"Looks that way." Whitey cast an eye over their work. The front of the toboggan was bent in a semicircle like the letter "C." The first batten projected beyond one sapling. The second batten, where the curve flattened out, was just clear of the other.

Whitey, holding the contraption in place against the natural spring of the birch, saw an objection. "If I let it go, it 'll spring back," said he.

"Mais non." Bateese drew a strip of rawhide from his pocket. With it he lashed the ends of the two projecting battens together. The rawhide stretched taut, forming the cord of the curve, taking the strain of the birch's remaining elasticity.

"I t'ink she do now," said Bateese.

Whitey let go of his end. The toboggan kept its shape. "She's a toboggan," he admitted. "But how're you goin' to get it clear o' this tree?"

Bateese pretended to be perplexed. "Dat's funny t'ing," said he. "De rawhide on one side, de toboggan on de odder. By gar, what we do, Whitey?"

Whitey looked blank. He joggled the toboggan to and fro. But it was just as Bateese said. The half circle of the toboggan's curve was on one side of the tree, the rawhide joining the ends of that curve passed to the other side.

Whitey dropped the toboggan. "What about it?" he asked.

Bateese grabbed his ax. Two swift strokes and he had cut through the sapling three feet above the ground.

"Lif' heem off," said he, with a grin.

Whitey obeyed. "Simple, ain't it?" said he. "Me, I'd have set here figurin' for quite a bit before I'd 'a' done it that way. Guess it's bein' city folks makes me so dumb."

"I t'ink you're not so—what you call heem—dumb," Bateese yawned. "An' now I'm tired, me. I t'ink I go to sleep."

"Suits me," Whitey agreed. "Just the same, I don't see the sense of it all. We ain't got dogs, and a man can't haul that contraption far on bad going."

"W'en we want dogs, we get dogs." Bateese was optimistic. "Mebbe we get dem from Injuns. Mebbe we don't want dem anyway. We stay here till the ice go."

He took a small pack, with enough food for two days, a blanket of woven rabbit skin, and his hand ax.

Whitey Wilkins watched him as he waxed his skis with a bit of melted candle to keep them from sticking to the soft snow; watched as he slid down to the river and struck off with long, sliding steps across the snow-covered ice. Then he looked at the toboggan leaning against the wall.

"Toboggan an' no dogs," thought Whitey. "Gee, I'd hate to be in a tight corner where dogs meant anything. If Bateese can find dogs in this country he's a wonder."

Bateese came back the following day. He came overland, for he had circled back into the hills on his quest. He slid down to the river at Elbow Bend and made for camp in short order.

"No luck, eh?" Whitey greeted him.

"Sacré!" Bateese was in bad humor. "Nevaire have I seen it so before. I fin' cabin here, cabin dere. But men? No! Not one Injun do I see. An' dogs! Whitey, I tole you there are not of dogs one *p'tit chien*, one leetle dog, in dis country."

"You don't surprise me none," Whitey laughed. "Good thing we ain't dependin' on them. But it's funny you didn't see signs o' any folks. Wonder what's up?"

"Me, I don't know." Bateese shook his head doubtfully. "But come, there's black ice on the river. The warm win' has melt the snow. Now it turn col' an' bimeby snow some more. An' before the snow she come again we go get some muskrat."

"Suits me." Whitey picked up the traps and followed his big partner.

The snow on the river had gone to a large extent. In places black ice showed. But along the shore drifts still lay.

They made good time to Elbow Bend, and once there Bateese slipped out of his skis. It was tricky walking. In places the cold snap following the thaw had made a crust that would bear. In other places a man would be floundering hip deep in the old drifts of early winter which had survived the soft spell.

Bateese made his way along the shore, picking up marks which, in the open season he had noted, marks that would guide him

to the feeding beds below the ice, where muskrat might be trapped even in the depth of winter.

Out from the banked snow along the shore projected a spur of rounded whiteness—the old log where they had caught their first rat.

"Hola!" Bateese knocked it with the head of his hand ax. "The good luck log, *mon ami!*" he cried.

The log shook. A shower of icy flakes fell from it. The gray bark showed through here and there. Bateese jumped up on it and looked out across the river. And then—his foot slipped. He lost his balance, strove to right himself. But the icy log was slippery. His boots could get no grip on its rounded smoothness.

Both feet shot upward. His last convulsive effort turned his big body half over in the air. He fell, hip to log. The hand ax, swinging round, caught him above the temple, stunning him.

Whitey Wilkins, a good hundred feet away, heard something crack. The smile with which he had greeted his partner's antics vanished. He came running up.

When he got there Big Bateese was lying limp across the log, his face white, his lips tight across teeth that ground convulsively together in agony. His thigh bone had snapped. The splintered ends were jabbing the tender flesh.

"Good luck tree." The thought flashed across Whitey Wilkins's mind, even as he stooped over his partner, to be erased by another thought even more disquieting. "No dogs!"

Eighty miles of rough going between their camp and the nearest help. And no dogs. When, after two hours' back-breaking work, he had fetched the toboggan, eased Bateese's limp body upon it, and dragged it back to camp, he appreciated still further what the lack of dogs meant.

He had dragged that toboggan a mile, and he was exhausted. There was a missionary with a rudimentary knowledge of surgery at the trading post, Fort Peril, eighty miles away. But so far as Bateese was concerned, he might as well be in Greenland.

Whitey got the big man into his bunk,

stripped off his clothes, then examined the break. The bone had snapped halfway between hip and knee. Already the great tractor muscles of Bateese's thigh were tensing, bowing the bone out.

As Whitey probed and felt, the big man moaned feebly. He was coming to.

"Easy, old man, easy," Whitey whispered.

"W'at happened?" Bateese's voice was low and tortured.

"Why, now"—Whitey tried to throw confidence into his words—"you kind o' banged yourself about, old-timer. Don't you worry none, Bateese. I'll lash this leg o' yours to a length of wood and she'll set right as rain."

But Bateese's eyes, searching his face, knew that he was bluffing. And Bateese's memory was going over half-forgotten stories of men with broken bones—men far from the doctor's care. And Bateese knew that the situation was serious.

But he was all man, this big Canuck. He would not show the white feather—though through his mind, too, the words ran:

"No dogs! No dogs!"

Whitey grabbed the hand ax, cut down a stiff birch sapling, split it. Then he stripped the bark off a young maple and, grubbing under the snow, found moss.

With these rude materials he contrived a splint, molding the bark about Bateese's thigh, forcing the bone back into line, padding here and there with moss, finally lashing the split sapling, part inside, part outside of the leg, from hip to toes.

"Now," he stood back, speaking with a cheerfulness that was but on the surface, "now you lie still, you old cripple, and we'll have that leg right, don't you forget it."

But Bateese could feel the blood pounding in his injured leg, knew that if the lashings of the splint remained tight the limb would swell. Knew, too, what would happen if they were loosened, when the great thigh muscles, shortening through long weeks of inactivity, would drag the bone back out of line, crippling him. He had seen what a broken thigh bone could do to a man, had Bateese.

Yet his voice still held a thread of firm-

ness as he replied: "You're good ~~medicine~~—how you call him?—doctor, Whitey," said Bateese.

"Hope so." Whitey spoke gruffly. His mind was on that toboggan. "Mebbe some one 'll happen by," he went on. "And if they do, well, you'd be better off up at the fort. Me, I got other things to do besides playin' nurse, you old stiff."

Bateese contrived to laugh, but it was pretty shaky merriment. Then for a moment both were silent.

Bateese it was who first voiced definitely their common thought. "Whitey," he whispered at last, "we got to go out."

Whitey Wilkins faced him miserably. "I—I know it. No use tryin' to fool you, Bateese. That there splint o' mine ain't worth a damn. But how 'll we make it? I might go through alone and bring help, but it 'd be eight days before I got back, and you'd freeze, let alone starve. There's no help near at hand, and—" He stopped, then, springing across the cabin, swung wide the door.

From the river came the welcome sound of a dog's bark. A big man with a team of six was mushing toward the cabin.

He stopped at the sight of Whitey at the door. "Might as well eat here," he called. "Good day to ye." Then unharnessed and fed his dogs a scanty ration of fish.

Whitey Wilkins watched him. He saw a tall, fleshy man, with small, close-set eyes. Whitey thought then, and, noting that the man was traveling downstream, away from the trading post, not toward it, he wondered. Wondered what price this stranger would ask before he turned round and made the trip out for them.

But he dismissed the vagrant thought as unworthy. This was the north country and Bateese was in trouble. Even the worst of men would play the game. And he had nothing against this stranger but those close-set eyes.

The man came up toward the cabin.

"First folks I've run across. Thought the country was cleaned out," he said. "Name's Gregson and I'm bound south."

"You're sure our luck, comin' just now." Whitey shook hands, then dropped his voice. "Partner's hurt bad, inside there—

broken hip. Suppose them dogs o' yours can yank him out to the fort?"

Gregson heard him in silence. Then he stalked into the cabin. Bateese was lying there, eyes closed, his face twisted with suffering.

"He ain't dyin'?" Gregson whispered, uneasily.

"No," Whitey explained. "It ain't a matter o' dyin', thank God! But if we don't get that there leg fixed right, it'll cripple him."

Bateese stirred restlessly.

Whitey raised his voice. "Where was you goin', Gregson?"

"Down south—close to Rouyn," he replied. "You ain't heard nothin'? Why, every one that can hit the trail's gone through long ago, all but me and them folks that had to stick to the fort. You don't mean to say you ain't heard? How long you been in here?"

"All winter," Whitey replied. "Nobody's come by here. But what's up near Rouyn? Another gold strike?"

"You said it." Gregson's eyes glittered, the red lids narrowed over them. "Struck rich in December—word leaked out. Injun packin' mail just brought the word up to the fort two weeks ago. An' every one stamped so's to get on the ground when the snow went. Why, they'll have everything covered for miles around. But me, I never had no luck. I was out on my trap line. Only come in four days ago and heard the news. So now I'm makin' tracks. But it's funny you never heard nothin'."

"Nobody's come by at all," Whitey explained.

"Come to think of it, they wouldn't," Gregson replied. "They'd go by them lakes east o' here. But, me, I don't trust them lakes. This thaw'll cut the ice to hell; spring lakes ain't safe for winter trails anyhow. So I'm takin' the longer way round. Pity I'm in a hurry"—he stammered a bit, now—"pity I ain't got time to give ye a lift back—but he ain't dyin', an' every man has to look out for his own end, ain't he?"

Bateese had paid little attention to their talk. His leg was hurting like fury. Words mattered nothing. A man with dogs had, apparently, materialized out of space. Since

they were in trouble this man would help them. So he lay there, conserving his strength, for soon Whitey and this Gregson would arrange matters, soon they would put him on the toboggan and start away on the eighty miles between their cabin and the fort. Any other outcome was impossible.

Then came Gregson's final answer: "*Every man has to look out for his own end.*"

"W'at you say, *m'sieu'?*" Bateese tried to raise head and shoulders. "W'at you say?" But the effort was too much for him. He fell back, groaning.

"When the chance comes a man's got the right to grab it," Gregson went on.

"You mean"—Whitey could not believe his ears—"you mean you're goin' right through? You ain't goin' to help us?"

Gregson hung his head for a moment. Then he raised it and stared defiantly at Whitey Wilkins.

"Why should I?" he asked. "It don't mean life or death. Here I been waitin' for my chance. God! Year after year in this rotten country. An' now it comes. With luck I'll strike it rich, rich I tell you. And you ask me to turn back, to take him out to the fort, eighty mile each way with a heavy load. It'd mean a week each trip and my dogs shot to hell."

"Mebbe you ain't got this right," Whitey explained patiently, holding his temper in leash, though he kept control with difficulty. "Mebbe you ain't got the rights of it, Gregson. Here's Bateese with a busted thigh bone. If we get him out right smart that missionary guy at the fort can fix it proper. If we don't, God knows if he'll ever walk straight again. Mebbe you think he could travel south with you—fifteen days on the trail. He couldn't. It'd kill him."

"It's hard luck you missin' out on your chance, but what about him? What about Bateese? You slip the harness on them dogs right quick and the sooner we start the sooner you're free to go grubbin' for your gold. But you'll play the white man first, Gregson, and don't you forget it, gold or no gold. It ain't this country that's rotten. It's some of the folks in it."

"Is that so?" Gregson snarled. "And if I don't?"

"I'll knock the livin' tar out o' you!" Whitey Wilkins's eyes narrowed, his lips met in a thin, bloodless line, his small body tensed. Balanced on the balls of his feet, he waited for the other's final word.

It came—and was unanswerable.

For Gregson, thrusting one hand inside his coat, drew out a gun.

"Hands off!" he grated. "Hands off! Beat the tar out o' this!"

Whitey Wilkins looked into the muzzle of that gun. For one wild moment he was tempted to chance it. But Bateese—what of Bateese if he tried and failed?

There was always a chance that he could bring Bateese through the winter. But if he, Whitey, jumped this Gregson and failed—well, a man with a bullet in his guts could do little sick-nursing.

"Don't do it. Don't tak' a chance," Bateese whispered.

"You got sense if the little codger ain't." Gregson held the gun firm. "I'm sorry I can't oblige. But you'll come through right, don't you worry."

He motioned Whitey back against the wall. "You shoot them hands up," he commanded, and came closer.

He ran his free hand over Whitey's clothes.

"You talk big for a man that ain't heeled," said Gregson. "Now I'll draw the rest o' your teeth."

He backed away, grabbed the rifles off the wall rack, one by one, and stood them by the door. Whitey's automatic, hanging in its holster from a pair of deer antlers, he pocketed.

"Know these here toys?" said Gregson as he made for the door. "I'm not wantin' a slug o' lead in the back."

"Where you goin'?" Whitey Wilkins, backed against the wall, white-faced, with cold rage, fixed the big man with his eyes. Something in their cold depths, something that burnt like fire, made Gregson pause.

"I'm on my way," he blustered, "on my way toward Rouyn—an' gold."

"You listen to me." Whitey was trembling. "You listen while I talk a spell, you yellow-bellied hound! Gold? Rouyn? You're on your way to hell, I tell you! Leave him here? Leave Bateese? Go to

it. One day I'll come up with you. Mind my name, Whitey Wilkins. I ain't never killed a man yet, but it's time I started. One day I'll get you. And if I don't the country will. It's a damn big country, but it's not big enough to swaller a small man. So help me, if you mush on, Gregson, there'll be a curse on you, a curse."

"Have done, have done." Gregson backed out.

"Whitey, Whitey, don't tak' a chance! He's scare," Bateese warned. "He's scare so much he'll shoot!"

Dumbly Whitey stood there. He knew that Bateese was right. He watched as Gregson paused on his way to pick up the rifles; watched as he harnessed his dogs. Then as he started them off down the river trail, Whitey Wilkins turned toward his big partner lying helpless in his bunk.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "Guess I'm no good, Bateese, lettin' a yellow swine put it over me like that."

"Nevaire min', Whitey," Bateese comforted him. "Maybe we get dogs somewhere. *Le bon Dieu*, he's not feenish wit' us yet. Maybe this leg heal all right yet. Maybe."

"Maybe." Something was stirring in Whitey's brain, a vagrant hope. "Maybe. Bateese, Bateese, we ain't done yet!" He swung out of the door. Down the river the dog team, a black line on the white snow was making for Elbow Bend. "There's a chance yet, old-timer." Whitey reached for his skis.

"It's a mile to the bend and a mile along the other reach by the river trail, *but it ain't a quarter of a mile overland!*"

"W'at you mean, Whitey? W'at you mean?" Bateese asked.

"I mean trouble." Whitey was slipping the skis on. "I'm goin' to cross overland and drop down on this here human dog like a ton of brick before he sees me. He'll find gold, will he? Like hell he will, but he'll make a discovery for all that."

A moment later and he was off.

IV.

GREGSON, rounding the curve of Elbow Bend a mile below, doubling back along the

either reach, climbed aboard the toboggan. There was just enough hard snow over the ice here to give the dogs good footing. And it was hard traveling on the webs. So he rode, prone, on the toboggan.

He was making time, but he felt uneasy. Ahead lay the new country where men had found gold. But behind lay an injured man who had needed his help. And the man's partner who had cursed him for refusing it.

He pulled himself together. "A man must look out for his own," thought Gregson, his little pig-eyes shining with greed. Then he shouted to his dogs, urging them on faster.

On his right the bank rose steeply. On his left a few rods ahead a stream tumbled into the large river. The toboggan was going even easier now. The traces were scarcely tight.

Far above him to the right a tiny figure appeared, a man on skis. Gregson would not have noticed him had not the man hailed him—a long wailing cry.

The man on the toboggan winced as if struck. He recognized that small figure. He drew a rifle clear of the tarpaulin covering that stretched from end to end of the toboggan and waited, his eyes on that figure above. If the fool started anything, Gregson was ready.

The dogs slowed down. The leader whined, hesitated, swerved.

Gregson picked up his long-lashed whip.

"Mush on, ye varmints," he cried, swinging it at them.

The dogs leaped forward. The tiny black dot above slipped over the crest of the slope, was coming down with lightning speed.

Gregson brought his rifle up to cover the approaching figure. No use taking chances. Ahead lay gold, riches. This man would stop him at any cost, even, he felt, at the cost of his, Gregson's, life.

He could hear the breathing of the dogs as they strained at their collars, could hear the scratch, scratch of their claws on the glare ice to which the snow had given place. And like an undertone through these other sounds came the tinkle of the little waterfall upon the left.

He brought his sights into line. The man

on skis was halfway down the slope within easy range. Best not to take chances. Best to wing him before he got to close quarters.

It was at this moment that the new black ice, formed since the thaw, crumpled. The heavy toboggan stopped, sank slowly.

With a hoarse cry Gregson dropped his rifle, clung desperately to the lashings that held the tarpaulin in place, settling with the toboggan into the icy grip of the water.

The lead dog and the two directly behind him, on firmer ice, clawed frantically for a foothold. The other three dogs, half in the water, half out, were helpless. The toboggan as it sank turned sideways, was caught by the current, carried slowly along towards the firmer ice below the hole.

Gregson, clinging to it, saw a ray of hope. If he could clutch that firmer ice, draw himself out, he might escape yet. He let go his grip and reached out frantically.

The toboggan, as if it were a living thing bent on thwarting him, dropped from under his feet.

He never knew that Whitey's long wailing cry had been a warning. Whitey knew the river, knew how thin the ice was near that small, spring-fed tributary. He had planned to drop silently down on skis, getting to grips with Gregson before the big man noticed him. But what he had seen at the top of the hill altered his plan. Too late to fight, he'd be lucky if he came in time to save. Hence his cry of warning.

And now Whitey, darting down from the hillside to the frozen bosom of the river, saw only two hands reaching up from the face of the still waters, saw them slowly sinking, two hands that clutched and clutched, yet found nothing within their grasp.

Then Gregson was gone.

Whitey had seen everything. He knew that river. The current was slow, but before he could reach that tragic hole in the ice Gregson would be beyond help.

There remained—the dogs. The toboggan had been drawn under, was pulling at the traces. Only one dog behind the leader remained on firm footing now. The other four were in the icy waters. And the leader was slipping, fighting hard but losing against the steady pull of the slow, remorseless current.

Whitey Wilkins, shooting out from the bank with the last of the momentum that the swift slide had given him, changed his course slightly.

"Fight it out, you huskies," he called.

And as he shouted the footing changed beneath him. His skis leaving the hard snow ran onto glare ice. He lost all power of control. But he had aimed true. He slid across over the crackling, buckling ice and fouled the traces back of the second dog.

The traces caught about his ankles, threw him. But his momentum carried the two dogs over towards shore, where the ice was firmer, where hard snow still clinging to it gave them a foothold.

Whitey, prone on the ice, dared not move for a moment. For the ice was thin. It might not serve to hold his weight and that of the dogs, should he rise.

He sized things up as best he could. Then loosed his skis. Four dogs were in the water—one of them probably drowned, for it was out of sight, drawn under the ice by the weight of the toboggan. The other three were trying to climb out. Their efforts seemed to have broken down the thinner ice at the edge of the hole, and the unbroken ice might hold them.

Whitey felt gingerly for the traces twisted about his ankles, and pulled, taking the strain slowly. His effort, weak in itself, served its purpose. The two dogs on firmer ice still tugged away like the well trained animals they were. One by one the three living dogs clambered out.

Then Whitey braced himself as best he might, took one hand off the traces, fumbled for his knife. He could feel the bump, bump of the toboggan through the ice beneath him. Suddenly he released his hold of the trace altogether. The dogs feeling again the whole weight of the toboggan began to slip and slide, clawing frantically.

He threw himself along the ice towards the edge of the hole. It crackled, that fragile ice, and sank a few inches. The water lapped at its edge, rose over it. As he reached down into the cold depths he could feel its icy caress along his side.

With a lucky stroke he cut the traces clear.

The dogs, released, shot forward. Then stopped; sank down panting.

Slowly, cautiously, Whitey Wilkins inched back over the bending, crackling surface, back to safety. On firm footing he got to his feet. As he did so the ice where he had been lying broke free, was drawn down by the current.

He shuddered. Somewhere below the white blanket that covered the river from shore to shore Gregson was drifting. Gregson who had sold himself for gold.

Whitey wrenches his thoughts away from the man. Later on he could think his case over; find, perhaps, some excuse for the selfishness that had been punished so terribly; but, for the moment, there were the dogs.

He looked them over as they lay there panting, the harness still on them. The big leader, finding the man's eye upon him, sat erect.

Whitey had heard tales of these huskies, of their savagery, knew them for one man dogs. He must, he felt, act quickly. If they rebelled against their new master he must handle them without fear.

He walked up to that big leader. To his surprise the dog took his coming as a matter of course. Whitey Wilkins, daring greatly, laid his hand on the big brute's head, patting it gently.

The dog, twisting his head sideways, licked Whitey's hand.

"You knowin' brute," Whitey ejaculated with relief. "I'll bet you know I saved you."

The big dog whimpered as if in agreement.

Then Whitey turned to the others. Three of them seemed all right. The fourth was done for. It was lying on its side, its tongue out, breathing hoarsely.

He bent over it. As he did so the dog's eyes filmed. Its breathing ceased. He drew out his knife once more and cut the traces close to its collar.

"We got to make it with four of you," said Whitey Wilkins.

He fumbled with icy fingers at his ski lashings, got them fixed, finally, then rose.

"Now if them dogs follows it's all right," he thought, "but if they don't."

He whistled to them and struck off along the tragic trail that Gregson had traveled. Better to stick to hard going for the dogs' sake. But would they follow?

For a moment they lay there, the four of them, eyes fixed on his retreating back.

He whistled again. The lead dog rose, started after him, the next dog, as the traces tightened followed, but the other two lay still. The lead dog, brought up short, whirled, snarled, his ruff erect. Then bounded back, slashing at the reluctant pair with his white teeth. Whining they rose.

His four dogs behind him, Whitey Wilkins munched homewards.

V.

TWENTY minutes later, Bateeese, lying in his bunk, heard once more the yelps of husky dogs.

Whitey was back—a palefaced little man with eyes that held a hint of horror in them. But his voice was firm as he greeted his big partner.

"All aboard for Fort Peril," shouted Whitey Wilkins.

"You got—Gregson, he change hees min'?" Bateeese asked.

Later Whitey Wilkins might tell his partner everything. For the moment, though, his lips were sealed.

"Changed his mind? Not so's you'd notice," Whitey answered.

"But you got dogs? Where's Gregson?"

"Him? He went on." Whitey evaded the point as best he might. "He went on, Bateeese, takin' two o' the dogs with him. An' now, old timer, we'll feed them brutes hearty, fix up a harness on the toboggan, an' four days from this you'll be at Fort Peril."

Bateeese sighed in relief. Once 'at the fort, hard though the journey would be, the missionary would fix that leg properly.

Then another angle of the case struck him.

"Dat old tree was hard luck for sure, Whitey," said Bateeese, as his partner fed the four huskies. "If I not fall an' break my leg we might have gone look for gol' like Gregson."

"God forbid!" said Whitey Wilkins, with a great sincerity.

THE END



PEANUT COMBINATIONS

A CIRCUS and a crowd,
Some pop corn and a boy,
A bag of peanuts, full,
A Trust of perfect joy!

Molasses candy, plain,
And peanuts, roasted right,
A Merger to the good,
And no one wants to fight!

A Slice of bread, cut thin,
And peanut butter thick,
Despite the Sherman Law
A Combination slick!

A party and a gang,
A plum-tree and a bank,
'And peanut politics,
A Malefactor rank!

Charles Irvin Junkin.



Throw Up Your Hands.

By **GEORGE F. WORTS**

Author of "Out Where the Worst Begins," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TERRIBLE TERMS.

IN Yumpa panic reigned. Thirst when water is not available is doubly accursed. Men were gathered in little knots about the street profanely discussing the gravity of the situation. Jim Rooney, owner of the Yumpa Grand Palace Hotel, was busy in the doorway of the Chinese laundry, connecting the speaking trumpet from his radio to the telephone receiver.

A small group was assembled about the hydrant which stood before the still smoldering ruins of Hell's Delight. The hose had been unscrewed, but it contained no water. Its contents had flowed unnoticed into the parched ground.

The hydrant was the only water connection in Yumpa, for Yumpa until the recent activities of Larry Wilpin, had had little use for water. To be sure, water was used in the preparation of food, and in Wun Lung Low's laundry; and one or two of the more fastidious gamblers regularly took a bath in water, yet they were exceptions.

The desert rats, the horse thieves and cattle rustlers, the human vultures of every description who made Yumpa their headquarters, looked upon bathing as effeminate. They were soaked to the skin only when they chanced to be caught unprepared in a rainstorm or, by mischance, fell into a river, or were thrown into watering troughs by roughly playful cowboys.

Not until the Yumpa water supply was

loud speaker trumpet, and the voice of Larry Wilpin boomed out into the bushed street, and it was vibrant with good humor.

"Hello, folks! This is station WOOF a-tunin' up and this here is The Voice from the Golden West announcin'."

"Cut out th' hossplay!" Jim Rooney roared into the transmitter. "We're a-dyin' down yere fer water, and we're willin' to make honest terms with ya. Speak out like a man!"

"Jest a minute," the bandit's voice replied in a cheery shout. "I cain't make a speech without somethin' t' drink. Miss Corbin, will you kindly draw me a cup of that cool, invigoratin' mountain water, please, ma'am?" There was a pause, then those in the street at Yumpa heard the unmistakable sounds of a man gulping water and smacking his lips.

Groans arose in the streets. Men cursed.

"Now, ladies and gents," the bandit resumed. "I am ready to continue. The sun is gettin' hotter and hotter and it looks to me like we're a-goin' to have a sandstorm some time this afternoon. But I ain't no weather prophet, so I will jest open my address by recitin' the fust two lines of a well known poem."

"We don't want no damn' poem!" Jim Rooney snarled. "Whut we want is water to quench our burnin' thirst!"

"But fust comes the poem," the bandit retorted. "And it runs like this. If I ain't correct will somebody in the audience kindly correct me?"

"Water, water everywhere,
And not a drop to drink."

A sullen roar filled Yumpa's main and only street. But the voice of the bandit silenced them.

"The young lady here beside me says I got that quotation wrong. I should have said:

"Water, water everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink."

"Excuse me, folks, for that blunder. And now, ladies and gents, I will get down to the nap, as my pappy used to say. Your good friend, Judge Oglethorpe, was mentionin' terms to me a little while back,

and I'm ready to discuss 'em now. You know by this time that I'm hard-hearted. What I went through last night at your hands sort of soured me on mankind.

"I came into Yumpa an innocent and unspoiled young man, and while there I had every one of my illusions wrenched away from me. In other words, not one of you offered me a friendly hand then, and I say turn about is fair play. I've got you where I want you, and this water is goin' to come high."

"State your terms!" roared Jim Rooney.

"I'm just gettin' around to that now. One of my lieutenants, Friday Pepper by name, left Dead Man's Pass about ten minutes ago with a paper in his possession that every man and woman in Yumpa has got to sign before these negotiations go any further. Mr. Pepper has gone down to your fair city as my pussonal representative, and when he comes I want him at the telephone.

"Remember, I hold each and every one of you in the holler of my hand, and if any harm comes to that grand old man, each and every one of you is a-goin' to suffer. Mr. Pepper will be my official water distributor if we can make terms that're satisfactory to me. Is he in sight yet?"

Necks were craned. Some one shouted. "Yere comes th' old maverick now!"

"I can hear you!" Red Wilpin's voice thundered into the street. "I want that fine old gentleman treated with the utmost courtesy, and when he comes I want him to read that there proclamation of mine aloud."

"Yere he comes!" Spavin Yampdon roared. And at that moment Friday Pepper, gazing warily about him, dismounted. He gave over his black mustang to one of the gamblers and proceeded to the telephone.

"Hello! Yere I am, chief! Shall I go ahead and read this yere paper to these folks?"

"Shoot the piece, Friday!" the black trumpet replied. "Read it real loud and I want the signature of every man and woman in Yumpa down on the bottom of it before we continue the negotiations."

Friday removed from his hip pocket a

THROW UP YOUR HANDS.

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sheet of paper, which he unfolded. In a ringing voice he read:

"To WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

"Whereinunder and inasmuch as the three parties hereinafter referred to as the parties of the first part namely and to wit, Lawrence Custer Wilpin, Margery Lee Corbin, and Friday Pepper, have met with unkind, inhuman and otherwise foul and lowdown treatment at the hands of the undersigned, herein-after specified as the party of the second part, we, the party of the first part, do declare and solemnly avow and swear that we are innocent of any wrongdoing or any actions that might be howsoever interpreted as such, for which reason, we the party of the second part, namely, the undersigned, do of our own free will excuse, forgive, condone and otherwise pardon the party of the first part for any acts or actions that we, the undersigned or the party of the second part, might in our ignorance and with our lowdown evil natures have suspected the party of the first part of committing.

"Special attention is directed to the vile and lowdown rumor set in circulation by certain parties, to wit and namely, that the party of the first part held up an alleged stage coach driven by the alleged Spavin Yampdon on the morning of August 15, and that the party of the first part did remove from the alleged persons of Julius Yost, Mrs. Yost, Judge Oglethorpe, and Marshal Jeffery P. Sniffin articles of value or money in any form whatsoever. For which reason, wishing to kill forever and for all time the above vile and unfounded rumor, we the undersigned, do hereby solemnly swear and declare of our own true will that the rumor is without foundation, in fact."

"That's an outrage!" Mrs. Yost cried. "I won't sign my name to such a preposterous instrument!"

"No sign, no water!" the trumpet blared sinisterly. "Go on and finish, Friday."

Friday Pepper cleared his throat and resumed.

"We, the undersigned, do further hereby swear and solemnly avow and declare of our own free will that the party of the first part did not at any time or under any conditions turn off the water supply of the town of Yumpa; and we hereby append our signatures, each and every one of us, each signer acting as a witness for each and every other signer. And we hereby finally forgive, excuse and pardon Lawrence Custer Wilpin, Margery Lee Corbin, and Friday Pepper for any acts or actions, real or imaginary, that may have injured or otherwise hurt our feelings. We

voluntarily and gladly declare that we cherish nothing in our hearts but love and admiration for the party of the first part.

"And there ain't nothin' to do now," old Pepper concluded, "but for each and every one to step up and sign the document. You can form in a line across the streets, ladies and gents, and if I catch a one of ya steppin' out of line or tryin' to sneak out of signin' this yere docymen—the deal's off!"

"I, for one," Judge Oglethorpe thundered, "won't sign that damnable network of lies!"

"I will!" Black Dan MacGillicuddy shouted. "I'm willin' to sign anything jest so I git my mornin' bath. Give me that thar docymen, Friday Pepper."

"Hold on!" Friday restrained him. "My chief give me strict injunctions to have Judge Oglethorpe sign fust, then Mrs. Yost, then her son, then th' marshal and finally Spavin Yampdon. Then th' rest of you can sign."

"Fer Gawd's sake, judge, sign it!" Jim Rooney implored. "Ain't it a case of life or death?"

"But it's utterly preposterous!" the judge angrily argued. "Of course, I'm thirsty. I want a drink of water as badly as the next man, but don't you realize that by signing this preposterous instrument, these three arch-criminals cannot be prosecuted? We are not compelled to sign it, are we? It is not a case of duress, as I would interpret that term. Gentlemen, before acting hastily, we must think!"

"Jedge," a burly prospector snorted, "you're cockeyed. Whut ya mean is—we must drink."

"Get in line like he said!" Big Sam Snarkey roared. "Line up thar—everybody! Judge, if you don't set yore name down on that paper right pronto—"

Judge Oglethorpe hastily removed a fountain pen from his vest pocket and scrawled his signature on the large sheet of wrapping paper upon which the ultimatum was written. The others of the original stage coach party signed in the order in which they had been requested, and slowly the cue wended its way across the street until the sheet was full of signatures and every man and woman in Yumpa was accounted for.

Friday Pepper refolded the document and replaced it in his hip pocket.

"Now, fer Gawd's sake," the shout went up, "give us some water!"

There was a rush to the hydrant. Those who had not already equipped themselves entered the nearest buildings and returned with receptacles of all sorts.

"Are we all set to do business now?" the voice of Larry Wilpin boomed from the black horn.

"All set, chief!" Friday briskly reported.

"All right. Everybody stand back. Let the live stock drink first. I ain't goin' to be cruel to no dumb animals. Bring up them hosses one at a time."

Whines, oaths and shouts of protest filled the hot morning air.

"To hell with them hosses! They don't even know they ain't had any water!"

"Drag up a tub," Friday ordered. "Each and every hoss in Yumpa has got to have his thirst quenched afore you humans can have a drop. Them are th' chief's orders, and if they're broken, there ain't goin' to be no water at all."

"Stand back from that hydrant. Push that tub under. Now, lead up the fust o' them hosses. And if anybody goes stealin' water from any o' them pore dumb beasts, th' party's over. All right, chief! Let down a leetle water. Jest enough t' fill an ordinary sized tub."

And the loud speaker belched: "All right, Margery! Give her a little whirl. Who-a-a —gal! Is she comin', Friday?"

"Not yit!"

They waited. The hydrant began to hiss. A low spluttering noise issued from it. Then water gurgled forth and became a steady stream. When the tub was almost full, the flow ceased.

"All right, chief!" Friday yelled into the mouthpiece. "Jest a tubful. Remember that fer th' next time. Now, folks, stand back from that tub. Stand away back. Mike, lead up that leetle blue roan and let her drink her fill!"

The crowd, muttering, staring avidly at the tubful of sparkling water, reluctantly fell back. The blue roan was brought to the tub. She commenced drinking with a sucking, gurgling sound.

The crowd groaned.

Then the blue roan placed her forefeet into the water and playfully splashed it about.

"Jest whut she's a-wastin'," one miner declared with bulging eyes, "would quench th' thirst of any five of us! Jest look at that!"

The blue roan was pawing the water now, sending it into the air in glittering, silvery globules and drops. One man, a cattle rustler, caught a few drops on the back of one hand, and avidly licked them off.

More water was let down from the stand-pipe for the playful blue roan while strong men glared and nursed parched tongues.

The blue roan drank its fill. The other horses, one by one, were led to the tub, and each was permitted to drink to repletion.

Five men fainted. The crowd groaned and muttered.

But there were those in the crowd who were not groaning and muttering; and in every assembly of human beings there will always be such men—shrewd and unscrupulous opportunists who hesitate at nothing to turn a dishonest dollar.

The last horse, its belly bulging, was led away. Friday Pepper addressed the transmitter.

"Hello, chief! The live stock has been watered."

"Sure there ain't any thirsty dogs or cats around?"

"Don't see nary a cat or a dog, chief."

"Any hogs, cattle, or other quadrupeds?"

"Ain't none in sight, chief."

"All right, then. Find out if there's anybody in the crowd who wants a drink now."

A roar burst from the crowd.

"It seems like they all want a drink," Friday reported.

"Have yore money ready, folks!" the loud speaker blared.

Another roar was released by the crowd.

"What in Sam Hill is the matter now?"

Judge Oglethorpe came stamping over to the transmitter.

"Look here, you robber!" he shouted. "This outrage has been carried far enough. Water is free, and—"

"No, it ain't, judge, not *this* water!"

"You'll suffer for this, you scoundrel!"

"Ask him how much he wants for jest one cup of water," pleaded one booze fighter with a hang-over.

Friday relayed the question. "Larty, they want to know how much ya're askin' fer a cup of that cool, sparkling, mountain water."

"This here water," the electrical megaphone boomed, "ain't the kind of water you folks get every day. There ain't any better water in the world than Yumpa City water. It's fresh from the mountains. It's pure. It's cold. Some say it has highly valuable medicinal properties.

"I've been drinkin' it all mornin', and I'm willin' to go on record and say it's the sweetest, purest, most refreshin', most invigoratin' water I ever swallered. It moistens the lips, it wets the tongue, it cools the throat and it soothes the most fractious stummick. It's high grade water, ladies and gents, and it's bound to command a good stiff price in the market. And remember, ladies and gents, friends and fellow citizens, we're dealin' now with th' ironclad laws of supply and demand. I got the supply and you got the demand."

"Stop that idiotic meandering," Judge Oglethorpe shrilled, "and tell us how much you want for the water."

"Well, judge," the distant bandit replied, "it all depends. Are you calculatin' on purchasin' some of this water by the cup, the bucket, the tub, or the bar'l? I'm willin' to make a discount fer quantity. Fer a carload lot, I'm willin' to say I'd do real well by you."

"I—want—one—cup—of—water!" the judge choked out.

"All right, your honor. It 'll cost you just two bucks, payable in advance."

Judge Oglethorpe threw his tin cup to the ground. His face was purple with his rising fury.

"I won't be held up, you scurrilous young bandit!" he roared. "I'll pay you fifty cents for a full cup of water and not one damned cent more. You can take it or leave it!"

And the temper of the crowd upheld him. It was an outrage. It was downright robbery. Two bucks for an ornery little cupful of ordinary, everyday water!

Through the clamor penetrated the voice of the water dealer.

"What's the verdict, Friday?"

"They won't do business at yore price, chief. Whut're my orders?"

"Come on back to Dead Man's Pass!" the bandit snapped. "The deal's off!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WATER PROFITEERS.

"WAIT a minute, pal!"

A delegation composed of Big Sam Snarky, Black Dan MacGillicuddy and Jim Rooney stepped up with gravity to Friday Pepper.

"We'll do business with yore chief," Jim Rooney announced briskly. "We'll buy water in quantity and we'll pay spot cash. Ask him how much he wants for a tubful."

Friday relayed this inquiry to his commander and the answer came back without an instant's delay.

"Two hundred bucks! Take it or leave it."

"We'll take it," Jim Rooney snapped. "Have yore superior fill that there tub to th' brim. And yere's yore money." And he counted two hundred dollars into Friday's extended palm.

The three profiteers surrounded the water tub; sat down with drawn pistols with their backs to it, and waited for it to fill.

When the tub was full, each of the three dipped into the tub with a cup.

Black Dan MacGillicuddy smacked his lips.

"Gawd!" he gasped. "Ain't it deelicious!"

The watchful onlookers groaned. Men cursed.

"Jest as clear and sparklin' as when it came out o' that leetle brook!" Jim Rooney concurred.

Big Sam Snarky sipped his water noisily. He sighed heavily between sips.

"Water!" he exclaimed. "Pure, sweet, wholesome drinkin' water at last!"

Belle, the dance hall girl, screamed. She advanced upon Big Sam with imploring arms.

"Give us a drink, pardner!"

"Not much, Belle, old gal," her recent employer replied jovially. "This yere water is wuth its weight in gold. Do ya suppose we paid out all that hard cash money fer this monopoly t' give water away?"

"Will ya sell me a drink?" the parched dancing girl gasped.

"Why, sartainly! Whut do ya suppose we cornered th' water market fer if not to sell at a profit?"

"How'll ya sell it, Sam?"

"We ain't quite got around t' that yit. How about it, Dan? What d'ya say, Jim? How'll we dispose of this yere gold mine of ours?"

"By th' paper cup," Jim Rooney said briskly.

"By th' what?" a miner whimpered.

"By th' paper cup, I said."

"Whut! Them leetle thimbles? Holy mackerel, them things don't hold more'n half a swaller!"

"Mebbe they don't hold much water, but they're real sanitary, and we got t' think fust of our clients' health. We cain't let our customers all drink out o' th' same cup and all come down with some dread disease, like typhoid or pneumonia. Belle, you trot into th' hotel and fetch out a half dozen cartons of them paper cups from that shelf above my desk."

Belle raced into the hotel and came tottering back with her arms full of long, slender white boxes. Black Dan accepted them, opened one box and stood the sanitary paper cups on a clean plank.

"Now, ladies and gents," Black Dan announced, "we're ready to do business. Who wants th' fust sanitary drinkin' cup of this yere cool, refreshin', exhilaratin', sparklin', thirst-quenchin' water? It's piped straight to our storeroom, ladies and gents, from th' babblin' torrents in yonder mountains! Every drop is icy cold and plumb full o' th' tang of th' great outdoors! Every drop dripped down into that sparklin' mountain torrent from some nice cold glacier. Every drop is chuck full of ozone, snap and vigor. It's healthy! It's sanitary! It's cold and it's wet!"

Judge Oglethorpe came rushing over with bulging eyes, but stopped with hands half raised at the threat of Black Dan's revolver.

"No rough stuff, jedge. This water hole is ours. We paid spot cash fer it. The fust man whut comes closer th'n five feet t' this concession without our permission is a goin' t' die like a dawg! Who wants t' buy some o' this dee-licious, invigoratin' water?"

"You know it's perfectly outrageous," the judge sputtered, "to sell water at any price in those absurdly small containers!"

"Jedge," Jim Rooney explained slowly and kindly, "ya evidently ain't well acquainted yet with the ways o' the West and how men comport themselves when they've gone without water fer a long spell. If ya knew yore West like ya do yore law ya wouldn't ask sech a childish question. When a man's gone without water fer a long spell, it's fatal fer him to drink it down in gulps. Th' customary and usual way fer him t' take water at fust is t' suck it out of a rag that's been dipped in water. Savvy? And each of these leetle sanitary containers hold a long, thirst-satisfyin' swaller. Are ya buyin' or ain't ya?"

"You three are inhuman monsters!" the judge sputtered. "Sell me this tin cup full of water at your own price. I will not drink water by the thimbleful!"

"Jedge, ya say that cause ya don't understand. Th' linin' of yore stummick is in a highly inflamed condition. I've seen strong men die in turrible agony who've gulped down water with their stummick in the dangerous shape yores is in."

The judge hesitated. And the man who had unwisely indulged in poison liquor came crawling a few inches at a time across the dusty road. He was gasping. His eyes were glassy and strange.

"Whar's th' water hole?" he gasped. "Tell me whar th' water hole is!"

"Right yere, stranger. Yan want to buy?"

"Shore, I want to buy. I'm a sick man. How much will ya sell me a cup fer?"

"Two bucks and a half, stranger."

"Fair enough!" the imbiber whispered. "Fill me up a cup and give me brimin' measure. Yere's a bill. It's a fiver. Gimme two cups."

Black Dan dipped into the tub with one of the cups. He poured its contents into

the yawning mouth of the drinker, and the man hissed and sucked the grateful liquid into his shattered interior.

"All right, ladies and gents," Big Sam cried. "Th' store is open. Step up one at a time fer yore cups—and don't crowd. Ladies fust!"

Only for a moment longer did the thirst-stricken group hold back. There were oaths and cries of "Profiteers!"—"Blood-suckers!"—But human endurance could endure the strain no longer. They squabbled and fought for a place in line.

Within half an hour the tubful was empty. Toward the last, the profiteers were disposing of water by the cupful for \$5. Their corner in water had netted them close to \$1,000! And the thirst of the crowd was by no means slaked.

Black Dan MacGillicuddy hastened across the street to Friday Pepper.

"Tell yore chief we want to put in another order fer a tubful right away—same terms, F. O. B. Dead Man's Pass."

"Nothin' doin'," was the answer from the standpipe. "The price of water has gone up. You fellers made more on that fust delivery than I did. This next tubful is going to cost you an even five hundred bucks."

"We'll take it at them terms!" Black Dan said decisively, and counted the bills into Friday's palm.

In all, four tubfuls of water were sold before trade fell off. And Friday had stowed away in his pockets \$1,700.

"Now," Black Dan said to Friday, "tell yore principal that we're ready to do some business in cold baths. Ask yore chief how much he wants fer enough water fer a man t' take a bath in. I reckon one of them tubs brimmin' full is plenty of water fer any man t' take hisself a bath in."

"Listen, Dan," Big Sam Snarky indignantly interrupted, "we ain't sold near all the water we kin fer drinkin' purposes yit. Why, we c'n sell a half dozen more tubs at a slightly reduced rate. Whut d'ya mean by lettin' go of sech a fine graft?"

Black Dan took him aside.

"Shet yore fool mouth, ya bonehead. Don't ya suppose I know we ain't met th' big popular demand yit? Of coss, I know it. But don't you realize th't we kin prob'lly

buy bathin' water fer a fraction o' whut we've been payin' fer drinkin' water? And ain't it th' same water?"

A light of understanding had dawned upon Big Sam's puzzled face, and together they returned to the loud speaker.

"Whut price is he askin'?" Black Dan inquired.

"I believe that a clean man ought to be encouraged," the water monopolist in Dead Man's Pass replied. "And I'm goin' to make a special low rate—for bathers only. Fifty bucks for a tubful of nice, cool, bathin' water. Now, Friday, kindly unconnect the loud speakin' horn and let me speak a few private words into your ear. Tell me when you're ready."

"All right, chief," Friday said presently.

He placed the receiver to his ear and listened. After an interval he nodded soberly and said: "I'll foller yore instructions t' th' letter, chief," and reconnected the loud speaker.

Julius Yost pushed his way through the crowd to Friday's side.

"I am speaking for my mother and my friends, Judge Oglethorpe and Marshal Sniffin. Each of us wants a bath. We were robbed of our money by that brutal coward. Here is my personal check for two hundred dollars."

Black Dan seized him by the elbow and spun him about.

"Look yere, stranger," he said harshly. "Me and my friends're runnin' this yere bathin' concession. Ef ya want t' save yoreself trouble, keep yore check in yore pocket ontil it's called fer. Savvey? If ya want a bath, we'll sell ya a bath—at th' proper time. Don't take that check of his, Friday Pepper. Yere's five hundred in cash. I'm payin' in advance fer ten baths, and I'm a goin' t' take th' fust one! Tell yore principal t' start th' water a runnin'. Hey thar, Sam! You and Jim git buckets and start fillin' up th' Grand Hotel bathtub as soon as this yere tub's full." And he winked broadly at Big Sam and Jim Rooney.

"Jest a minute, friends," Friday Pepper said. "I've got t' attend t' somethin' fer th' boss afore this water is turned on fer you boys' baths."

He crossed the street briskly and entered

the Yampa Grocery Emporium. When he returned, he carried a package under one arm.

"All right, chief," he called into the transmitter. "Let th' fust tub of bath water down easy."

Friday stood beside the tub as it filled.

"All right, boys," Black Dan cried, as the water reached the tub's brim. "Fill yore buckets!"

"You boys shore ya're a goin' t' use this water fer bathin' purposes?" Friday said sternly.

"Why, bless yore old heart, o' coss we are!" Black Dan boomed jovially.

"It's fer external use only," Friday persisted. "This yere water ain't to be used fer drinkin' or cookin' purposes under any conditions. That's clear, ain't it?"

"Shore it's clear, old pal!"

"I jest wanted to make shore ya wasn't buying it under any false ideas or fixin' to sell it under any false pretenses," Friday said. And he ripped the top off the package, dipped into it with his hands and tossed a heaping handful of a white granular substance into the water.

"Whut in Sam Hill is that?" Black Dan roared.

"Nothin' but Scrubine, Dan. Th' chief gave me orders t' doctor it up fer external use only."

"Soap powder!" Black Dan moaned, and backed away from the tub as though it contained poison. "Holy sufferin' cats, I can't sell ten baths to this yere crowd, not with a hull yar t' do it in!"

His two colleagues, Big Sam and Jim Rooney sidled up to him.

"Ya got us into this," Big Sam snarled. "Now, whut're ya a goin' t' do t' git us out?"

"Whut kin I do, boys?"

"Ya said ya wanted th' fust bath."

"But I was only playin', boys."

"Wall—ya're a goin' t' take it!"

"Good Gawd, Sam, have a heart! You know me well enough to know whut a deadly aversion I got agin baths. Ya want me t' catch pneumonia and die, don't ya?"

"I don't keer whut else ya catch," Big Sam said relentlessly, "but ya shore are a goin' t' catch a bath. Grab him, boys!"

Karl and Gory—you two tote th' tub into th' hotel, will ya? We're a goin' t' see th't Black Dan gets bathed proper. Dump in some more o' that Scrubine, Friday, a good, stiff jag of it."

Willing hands seized the tub and Black Dan. Fighting with the fury that is commonly ascribed to madmen, he was carried into the Grand Palace Hotel, and presently his picturesque oaths could be heard, punctuated by the splashing of water and the harsh, scraping sound of a scrubbing brush on his skin.

But when he emerged he wore a smile.

"Folks," he announced, "I want t' tell ya that those of ya who have never took a bath—and I reckon that sweepin'ly embraces most everybody yere—ya don't know whut ya've missed! That cool, cleanin' water agin the skin is a brand new sensation. I'm converted. From now on I catch me a bath regular every Sattidy night. Now, who's next? Who wants one of these refreshin', invigoratin', sensational, novel baths?"

Doubt and irresolution swayed the crowd for a moment, then they surged forward.

Julius Yost fought his way through the press.

"How much are you going to charge—you highway robber?" he snarled.

"One hundred bucks! And take my word fer it, stranger, ya'll git th' s'prise of yore life!"

"Will you accept a check?"

"Shore!"

Julius wrote a check for four hundred dollars—for four baths.

Wun Lung Low presented himself at the hydrant with a copper washboiler when the demands for baths had somewhat subsided. He wanted undoctored water. It was filled at a cost, to him, of forty dollars. The profiteers had paid twenty dollars.

Julius Yost, freshly bathed, grasped him by the arm as the laundryman started back to his laundry with the full washboiler.

"How much do you want to launder this shirt?"

"Fif' dolla'."

"That's too steep!"

"Solly. Walla steep, too. Laundry sky high!"

At the door of his laundry Wun Lung Low was halted by the frantic proprietor of the Busy Bee Lunchroom.

"How much d'ya want fer just half o' that water, Wun Lung?" the cook-proprietor demanded.

"Fotty dolla'."

"Sold!"

It was, it appeared, destined to be a day of inflated values in Yumpa. No matter for what purpose it was intended, the three profiteers contrived to secure every drop of water that passed from the hydrant. Presently water was being bought and sold on margin. After the first craving had been satisfied, the price soared again. Water took on new values. To own water became a mark of distinction. One bucket of water, wanted by a cook, was sold and resold five times. Its initial price was ten dollars; and it was sold to its ultimate purchaser for eighty-seven dollars and a half. Yumpa was water mad! In less than five hours Friday Pepper sold five thousand dollars' worth of water.

The prices charged by the three restaurants were reminiscent of gold rush days in interior Alaska. A cup of tea brought two dollars; a cup of coffee three dollars; a plate of soup seven dollars and a half.

And at four o'clock in the afternoon, by an ironical thrust of fate, the bottom was washed out of the water market.

Rain descended in torrents. A veritable cloudburst threatened to inundate the cup in which Yumpa lay!

CHAPTER XXXV.

RETRIBUTION!

UNHEEDED by the water speculators, the storm of the preceding night had wheeled away to the west and returned. The sky became overcast so suddenly that no one noticed. Water descended in sheets. It drummed on the roofs; it roared through the eavespipes and gutters; it carved miniature cañons in the dust which had suddenly turned to clay. At the rate at which water had been selling in Yumpa in the last five hours, a million dollars' worth fell in the first five minutes.

Spavin Yampdon, who had been patiently awaiting his turn at the bathtub, rebelled and demanded that his one hundred dollars be returned. His demand resulted in a fight with Black Dan MacGillicudy, in which the tubful of water was overturned.

But this incident was forgotten in the drama of a vastly more vital occurrence.

Friday Pepper was at the telephone with the receiver at his ear—the loud speaker and amplifier had been disconnected—and was asking for orders when the storm broke.

"The gang yere is beginnin' to talk nasty and givin' me one dutty look after another," he announced. "And it's rainin' cats and dawgs, Larry. Hadn't I better beat it back while the beatin' is good?"

"You shore you've sold all the water you can?"

"Holy mackerel, Larry, water ain't nothin' but a glut on th' market down yere now. It's rainin' water, I tell ya!"

A crash of thunder blotted out Red Wilpin's reply.

Judge Oglethorpe, Marshal Sniffin, Julius Yost and his mother were standing behind Friday, and they clearly heard his question.

They exchanged glances; but Marshal Sniffin shook his head.

"Nope," he said decisively. "That fellow up there still has us trapped. And as long as he holds that pass, we can't do anything to this hombre. We'll have to bide our time." A cold, malignant light shone in his eyes. "And our time will come, never fear!"

"We must get that paper we signed!" Mrs. Yost whispered.

"We will!" Judge Oglethorpe breathed.

They stopped talking and listened. Friday was shouting into the receiver again.

"Say that agin, Larry! Ya want me t' start right now?"

The words were not out of his mouth before a monstrous crash shook Yumpa to its very foundations. Forks of green lightning sprayed out from the telephone in Friday Pepper's hand. Without a murmur he collapsed to the floor, senseless!

"It must have struck the wire!" Judge Oglethorpe gasped. "And if it struck the wire, the man at the other end—" He left the sentence unfinished.

Regardless of the danger, he snatched up the fallen instrument and called loudly into the transmitter.

"Hello! Hello!"

There was no response.

"Hello! Hello! Wilpin! Answer me!" he shouted.

But the only sound in the receiver clamped to his ear was a faint scratching—static—caused by the electrical storm.

He replaced the receiver on its hook, turned about and looked from one tense face to another.

"Well?" he rasped.

"We've got them!" Julius cried hoarsely. "That flash must have come out at both ends of the circuit!"

It was true. In Dead Man's Pass, Larry Wilpin lay stretched out on his back near the telephone box where he had fallen when the bolt struck the wires. And beside him, vaguely rubbing her eyes, sat Margery Corbin, who had been stunned to semi-consciousness by the shock.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GRIM DEATH.

DEAD!" Margery Corbin screamed. The bolt of lightning that had struck the telephone wire and knocked Friday Pepper senseless at one end and Red Wilpin unconscious at the other, had only dazed the girl. It seemed to her that a chain of flickering green sparks had leaped from Larry's Wilpin's side to hers. She had recovered from that shock to find herself sitting on the ground near his sprawling body. And now, placing an ear to his heart, she could hear no sound.

All about her the rain beat down into puddles, and these enlarging puddles trickled off into a small torrent that cascaded down into the valley of Yumpa. The lightning and thunder appeared to be receding.

"Dead!" she repeated in a choked whisper. Then, in futile frenzy, she caught at his cold hands and rubbed them; pressed her cheek against his, as if she might impart some warmth to that beloved face. Her true love!

A chilling numbness crept upon her. She arose to her feet and tottered to the telephone. The receiver was hanging by its dark brown cord, and she picked it up. It was still warm—still warm from his beloved touch! Choking back a sob, she depressed the hook and rang Yumpa.

A voice, strange and excited, answered her.

"Is that you, Friday?" she asked faintly.

"No, it ain't, gal!" the voice shouted. "Friday Pepper's a layin' yere on th' floor deader than th' deadeast thing I ever saw."

"The lightning struck him, too?"

"Ma'am, it percolated him good! Whut shape is yore sweetie in, if I may ask, ma'am?"

"Dead!" she sobbed. "Who is this?"

But the voice at the other end no longer heeded her. Evidently the man had dropped the receiver and was spreading the news, for she heard his voice as if from a distance:

"Red Wilpin is dead! It struck him th' same time it struck Friday!"

Then some one called: "Is th' leetle gal all right?"

And the answer: "Shore! Wasn't I jest a talkin' to her?"

Commotion followed. The diaphragm in the receiver rattled tinnily with the din. Then voices emerged, sharp and contesting.

"No, she ain't! I spoke up fer her fust!"

"You got enough gals, Black Dan Mac-Gillicuddy!" still another voice roared. "I've been a hankerin' fer that sweet leetle thing ever since I fust laid eyes on her. And there ain't goin' to be no argyment!"

"You're mistaken—all of you," a cold, incisive voice broke in, and Margery, swaying beside the phone box, recognized the accents as those of Julius Yost.

"I've wanted that little girl for a long time," he added. "I've gone through hell and high water to get her and now I'm going up there and take her home with me as my wife. And if any of you have any serious regard for your lives, you will keep out of my way. I am a dead shot, and I am going to shoot any man who stands between me and that girl."

"We'll match fer her!" a hoarse voice bellowed.

"We'll do nothing of the kind. It's

settled. She's to be Mrs. Julius Yost. And any of you who touch that girl will have to answer to me."

Margery dropped the receiver with a groan. She knelt again beside the red-haired bandit and took his head tenderly in her arms, cradling it to her breast.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she crooned, and the rain pelted in her curly dark hair and on her shoulders. "Larry—darling," she said dully, "they wouldn't dare say such things if you were only—here. They know you'd defend me with the last breath in your dear body. He's coming up here to get me, Larry. He's coming up here to take me away from you—you, the only man I have ever loved or could love. Larry!" she cried. "You're not dead! Oh, you can't be dead!"

Gently she lowered his head and covered him with a poncho. Then panic seized her. Julius Yost was coming up here. She must conceal herself somewhere, somehow! But as far as she could see in all directions, there was no hiding place. Behind her the cañon loomed, misted with rain, its sheer walls defying ascent. And in the other direction lay the unbroken plain—and Yumpa. All about her were rocks, large and small, but they afforded only temporary concealment.

Her roving eyes encountered the glistening, round, black side of the water tower. The thought of taking her life had never before occurred to her. Now it presented itself as the only logical solution to the myriad problems confronting her. Yes, death was preferable to Julius Yost.

She would, she decided, climb the narrow steel ladder riveted to the side of the great tank, and dive in. Then the decision would no longer be hers. She would, perhaps, swim about until exhausted, or, if she preferred, she would inhale long drafts of the icy water and put an end promptly to it all.

Dimly, vaguely, she remembered having read somewhere that death by drowning was swift and not at all dreadful. With lungs full of water, the heart action simply stopped, and she would float off into a dreamy blackness into which a divine light would presently fall and somewhere down

the road of eternity she would again clasp hands with her dead lover.

The rungs of the steel ladder were wet and cold and slippery. She clutched at them with a fierce energy, mounting slowly, falteringly. The rain sluiced past her and upon her in chilling gusts. She sneezed. She was taking cold. Then she smiled bitterly. What difference did it make? Taking cold when her darling was *growing* cold!

Ah, life had been short. The years since childhood passed in a fleet procession. She had never been happy, genuinely happy, until she came West and freedom and romance and high adventure were offered to her by a clear-eyed, bronzed-skinned youth who laughed at danger. Yes, it had been worth while. They had had their little moment. Happiness had shone upon them with the tenderness of moonlight.

A little sob caught at her throat. But if they could only have gone on to the pots of gold at the rainbow's end! How she had been dreaming of the little white farmhouse, "overlooking nineteen ranges of mountains," as he had once described it! How happy they would have been there! Oh, how happy! Working out their destinies. Realizing the hopes and the dreams of those hardy pioneers. *His children* at her knees!

A sob racked her; hot tears blurred her vision. Below her all was swimming grayness, while above—Only a dozen more rungs to the top! And then—oblivion!

Unseen by her misted eyes, the stricken bandit pushed the poncho away from his face with a feeble effort of one arm. He gazed vaguely about him. He could not move his head, but his dazed eyes made out a pale spot that seemed to be clinging to the top of the water tower. As his vision cleared, he identified it. A sob floated down to him on the rain-soaked wind.

And suddenly Red Wilpin's brain captured the truth. Believing him to be dead, Margery was climbing the water tower to commit suicide!

He tried to move, but could not. He tried to call, but only a hoarse gasping came from his constricted throat.

She reached the top. He saw her clamp her hands above her head for the dive into

the great tank. And suddenly she disappeared!

Blackness swept upon him again with a deathly sound, as of wings.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SAUCE FOR GANDERS.

IN Yumpa the greatest excitement prevailed, and the keynote was exhilaration. By a stroke of Providence, the enemies of Yumpa had been disposed of. Friday Pepper was dead. Red Wilpin was dead. Margery Corbin was powerless. Yumpa was freed from the yoke of the oppressors at last!

Sombreros were thrown into the air, and cheers were heard on every side. The siege of Yumpa was over!

In the prevailing excitement, the crumpled old man on the floor was forgotten. The fact that Friday Pepper had disposed about his pockets upward of \$5,000 and a document signed by every biped in Yumpa, clearing him and his employer of any and all misdeeds, was for the time being overlooked. Mobs are ever swayed by whims, and the whim of this mob was to gloat upon the corpse of the bandit who had brought such sufferings upon them.

"Let's have a parade up thar," a grizzled old miner suggested.

His suggestion was hilariously adopted. Those who had horses, mounted them; those who had not, walked. And at the head of the procession rode Julius Yost on the blue roan. A triumphant light burned in the Easterner's eyes. Margery Corbin would be glad to see him now!

But when he and his companions reached the desolate spot where the black water tank rose sheerly against the low rain-clouds, no vestige of life was visible. The bandit, his red hair plastered to his forehead by the rain, lay stretched out under a poncho. The girl was nowhere to be seen.

"I want my diamonds," Mrs. Yost announced in a clear, authoritative voice.

"And I want my watch, my stickpin and my wallet," Marshal Sniffin declared.

Judge Oglethorpe pushed his way through the crowd pressing about the fallen outlaw.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes, yore honor," a prospector said in a hushed voice. "He's buzzard fodder now."

The judge rubbed his hands and smiled sadly, as he shook his head. "The way of the transgressor is hard. This young outlaw robbed me of a watch that I prized highly. It was a Jerginson."

"Whut's a Jerginson, yore honor?" the prospector inquired in respectful tones.

"A Jerginson," Judge Oglethorpe replied, "is the name of a watch manufactured in Switzerland. This one was presented to me by my associates when I retired from my bench in the appellate division. A Jerginson, my friend, not only tells time by split seconds, seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years; but it will strike the hour, the quarter and the minute by merely pressing a button, and it can be set to ring an alarm at any hour you may wish to be aroused."

"I shore would like to see that there timepiece, yore honor," said the prospector.

"The diamonds in the monogram alone are worth two thousand dollars," the judge informed him. "Now, if you people will kindly step back, we will search this man's clothing for our stolen property."

The crowd moved back, and Judge Oglethorpe commenced his search. In one coat pocket he found Mrs. Yost's diamond rings and ear pendants, Marshal Sniffin's watch, fob and stickpin, and two billfolds which were identified as his own and the marshal's. In another pocket was Julius Yost's billfold and a wad of bills of large denomination.

"Them're mine!" Black Dan MacGilligan-cuddy cried. "He won that roll off'n me in a crap game last night. It's mine! Hand it over, jedge!"

The judge relinquished the money to him. Presently in a trouser pocket, he found a heavy mass of five, ten and twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"That there's mine!" the roulette croupier of Hell's Delight shouted. "All that gold's mine. I never paid off in nothin' but gold. He won it off'n me bettin' on th' red. Give it here!"

Like vultures they crowded about the prostrate form of the electrocuted bandit

until, dollar by dollar, they had stripped him of his possessions. It was Belle, the dance hall girl, who took the silk bandana handkerchief from his neck and draped it shamelessly about her own.

"I want a souvenir t' remember him by," she explained, but she deceived no one.

"Where's my Jerginson?" Judge Oglethorpe finally exclaimed. "It's gone!"

"Did ya look in th' pocket o' that leather shirt?" the prospector inquired. "I shore do want t' hear them leetle bells tinkle, yore honor."

With trembling fingers Judge Oglethorpe unbuttoned the flap of the leather pocket. A look of pain crossed his face as his fingers delved into the pocket and explored. Presently they withdrew with something that glittered. A low, gurgling cry was torn from his throat.

"My watch!" he moaned. "My Jerginson!"

By some caprice, some prank of electricity, the bolt of lightning that had struck down Red Wilpin had reduced that remarkable time piece to a shapeless ingot. In his hand was nothing but a lump of molten metal, a grotesque mass of gold, lead, brass, copper, iron and glass! Here and there a diamond twinkled.

But the judge's lamentations went unheard. Having picked the bandit clean, the vultures had gone on to new fields. An exhaustive search was now being made for Margery Corbin. The party broke up into groups. They went a mile up the cañon; they looked behind rocks. In their avid quest for the greatest prize of all, they left, so to speak, no stone unturned.

Once, as his eyes wandered over the rain-drenched landscape, Julius Yost's glance hesitated at the steel ladder leading to the top of the standpipe. Could she have climbed to the top of the tank and jumped in? But he dismissed this idea at once. Somewhere in these hills she was hiding, and he would remain until he found her.

After poking about among bowlders and cactus for an hour or more, the mob lost interest and gave up the search.

"We ain't gone through Friday Pepper yit!" Black Dan McGillicuddy suddenly recalled. "He's got all the money on him

he blackmailed out of us during th' great water famine. He's got well onto five thousand bucks o' Yumpa money in his pockets!"

"And that preposterous document!" Mrs. Yost exclaimed. "It clears that girl of her criminal part in the stage coach robbery. And she must be brought to justice!"

In haste the mob returned to Yumpa. The return became a race. Who would be the first man to plunge his hands into Friday Pepper's richly-lined pockets?

Karl the Killer, mounted on a long-legged, big chested chestnut, was the first to reach the laundry of Wun Lung Low, where the corpse of the old mountaineer had been left. Karl the Killer dismounted and fairly threw himself through the doorway.

The others came galloping up as the Killer staggered from the laundry to the street, white and shaking with terror.

"He ain't thar!" he croaked.

"Whut!" a hundred voices roared.

"He's gone!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REUNITED.

SOON after the departure of his enemies from Yumpa, Friday Pepper had opened his eyes and sat up.

"Where am I?" he whimpered; but the only answer was the pelting of the rain on the roof of Wun Lung Low's laundry. Presently his mind took up its functioning; he recalled the sounds of lightning snapping and crackling in the telephone receiver and realized that some electrical discharge, larger than its fellows, must have dealt him a shock sufficiently powerful to render him senseless.

He rang the water tower, but there was no response. Accurately he surmised that Red Wilpin must have been dealt with similarly. Wondering why Yumpa was so quiet, he went out into the rain-swept street, to find it deserted. Even his own horse was gone. With staggering steps he crossed to the ruins of Hell's Delight. He was cold and chilled and still somewhat dazed and he was sorely in need of a bracer.

Arriving by dead reckoning at the approximate position of Hell's Delight's once famous bar, he began pulling away boards. Beneath a jackstraw tangle he found finally that for which he was so painstakingly seeking—a dark-brown, quart bottle. Water had washed the label away, and in some doubt as to its contents, Friday drew the bottle's cork and sniffed.

"Is it licker or is it shellac?" he mused. "The licker up at this bar always smelt like shellac, but they's a leetle difference in th' taste." Still in a quandry, he tasted the fluid, rolling it well around with his tongue. He swallowed the taste and awaited results.

The first effects of the questionable liquid were comparable to those which might have resulted from a stream of white-hot sparks passing rapidly down his throat. For a time nothing happened. Then a burning sensation directly beneath the lowermost of his floating ribs apprised him that the charge had reached his stomach.

By degrees, a sense of well-being pervaded Friday, and he reached the conclusion, with a happy surge of relief, that the bottle contained, not shellac, but Hell's Delight's familiar brand of "genuine Kentucky Bourbon."

He placed his right thumb at the exact halfway point on the bottle and, after a few long drafts, lowered the contents to the indicated imaginary line.

"If my pal is still alive," Friday thought cheerily, "this yere licker fire will stop or prevent any germs f'm takin' hold on th' lad. If they's a spark o' life left in him, this yere will fan it to a roarin' blaze. Now, le's take a leetle snoop around and see jest whut's goin' on."

A thorough investigation bore out his original guess. The inhabitants and guests of Yumpa had gone forth in the rain, and as there was but one place to go when departing from Yumpa, Friday started plodding toward Dead Man's Pass, the bottle of restorative clasped fondly in his gnarled old hands.

He had covered all but a few hundred feet of the distance when a rift in the storm-blown rain disclosed an approaching cavalcade. He looked hastily about for shelter, but no hiding place disclosed itself save be-

hind the clump of cholla cactus which he had observed from Sentry Rock earlier in the day. His knowledge of the habits and traits of cholla cactus caused him to hesitate, but the hoofs of the cavalcade were drumming nearer and nearer; so, dropping to his hands and knees he approached as close as was humanly possible to the cluster of prickly vegetation.

The cavalcade swept past within a few yards of his hiding place, and the horsemen were followed by a procession of running men and dance hall girls.

When the last of these had gone on into the rain, Friday backed away from his refuge and hastened through Dead Man's Pass.

The young man whom he had raised from childhood was lying as the human vultures had left him. The poncho had been jerked aside; the pockets of his coat and riding breeches were so many protruding pale ears.

"Th' buzzards!" Friday growled, as he knelt at his employer's side.

He lifted Red Wilpin's head and poured a generous dose of whisky into the young man's mouth. And as that vigorous stimulant trickled down into his interior, a tremor passed through the youthful outlaw. Presently his eyelids fluttered up and the muscles of his face twitched several times.

"Where's—Margie?" he whispered.

"Oh, she's all right, kid," the old mountaineer said huskily.

"Where is she, old pal?"

"Oh, I reckon she just went for a leetle walk, pardner."

"But—but I saw her climbin' up th' ladder on that standpipe, and she clapped her hands together and took a long dive in."

"Great grief, son, ya shore?"

"Yes," the bandit whispered.

"Wall, ain't ya kind o' glad to git rid of her? Ain't she been a pest and a nuisance f'm th' word go?"

Red Wilpin feebly pushed his ancient retainer away.

"How can you talk that way? I love her! And—now she's gone! She took a high-dive into that there tank. She's a-lyin' down at the bottom—drowned! And if she's gone, I don't want to live. I can't live without her. Fer God's sake, put me out o' my misery! Put a bullet into me! I don't

want to live. Take yore old forty-five and drill me—right here!"

"Ya mean it, lad?"

"I'm askin' ya, man to man, to end my sufferin's. Ya've been a true friend to me all my life, Friday Pepper; don't go back on me now. Do an act of kindness and git it over with quick!"

Friday Pepper reluctantly drew his old forty-five.

"It don't seem right to lop down a young feller like you who ain't had th' chance yit to know th' fun thar is in life. But I'll do as ya, say, lad. Ya want th' bullet to enter yore heart clean. I'll put it thar!"

"Quick, Friday!"

"All right, son, all right." And slowly rising from his knees, the old mountaineer dashed the tears from his eyes, cocked the hammer and took careful aim.

Red Wilpin closed his eyes.

"Shoot!" he gasped.

A woman's terrified scream shattered the tense silence.

"Help!" she screamed. "Help!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALIVE OR DEAD.

FRIDAY lowered the forty-five and looked bewilderedly about him, but the scream had, strangely, seemed to come from somewhere aloft. His startled gaze went up to the top of the water tower. A white face surmounted by a crop of dark bobbed hair was visible at the rim.

"Wall, whut in Sam Hill," he roared, "are ya doin' up thar?"

"I came up here to commit suicide," she wailed, "but there's a lid on it."

"Ain't they a trap door?"

"No! Not even a crack! And it slopes! And I'm getting dizzier and dizzier. I must have fainted."

"Wall, come on down."

"But I'm too exhausted to! And I don't want to come down. Larry is dead. I—I think I'll just jump and end it all."

Slowly Larry struggled up to a sitting position.

"Hey, Margie," he called, "don't jump. I ain't dead!"

She did not reply. Instead, her hands, which had been clasping the rim of the tank, slipped downward until her arms hung limply. She had fainted again.

Larry jerked his thumb toward the ladder.

"Climb up and bring her down, Friday."

The old mountaineer backed hastily away.

"Me?" he shrilled. "You know how them heights give me vertigo, Red Wilpin. Risk my life fer that gal? Not much I don't! Let her stay up there. It's the safest place she's been in yit. Ain't done nothin' since we took up with her but t' git us into hot water. Let well enough alone, is my motto."

Slowly, with a great effort, the red-haired bandit arose to his feet and tottered to the ladder.

"Don't be a durn fool!" Friday shouted. He laid a restraining hand on the young man's elbow, but Larry Wilpin struck it aside.

Rung by rung the young outlaw climbed, the rain swirling about him, the world swimming in a dark, reeling mist. He gripped his lower lip with his teeth until the blood came, and so fought back the nausea that threatened to overwhelm him. But he reached the iron roof of the stand-pipe at last, lifted the unconscious girl in one arm and started the descent.

How far below him the ground seemed! And it was peopled with grotesque dancing shapes. In his imagination, he believed, he saw a monstrous black mass rising beyond the eastern mountains and sweeping forwards like some gigantic bird of prey. He heard faintly the thin, entreating voice of Friday Pepper.

"Hang on, kid, yo're a slippin'!"

He would hang on! He would! And he did! Finally a numb heel sank with a gurgling sound into the oozy ground. Then blackness swept back upon him, and he fell with a great splash.

Red Wilpin returned to consciousness and a sound of shouting wind. Overhead, the black mass he had imagined he saw sweeping up from the eastern hills, was

spreading as ink dropped into water will spread. Near his hand was an empty brown bottle, and his lips and mouth still smarted with the stimulant. And beyond the bottle lay Margery Corbin, lying in a little heap with eyes closed.

Friday Pepper was nowhere to be seen. An inch at a time the courageous young outlaw worked his way to Margery's side. The rain continued to slash down upon them.

"Margie!" he whispered. "Margie!" Her eyes went open; a faint smile fluttered at her beautiful lips.

"Am I dreaming?"

"I dunno," he said thoughtfully. "Mebbe we're both dreamin'."

"Did I leap from the lid of the stand-pipe?"

"Nope. I clumb up and toted you down."

She sighed blissfully. "I thought you were dead. And I—I couldn't live without you. Kiss me, Larry."

His lips, cold and wet with rain, met hers.

"You love me, don't you, dear?"

"Sure, I love you. You're one sweet kid and I wanted to die when I thought you'd gone and jumped into that there tank. I thought I had died. Matter of fact, I ain't so doggoned sure we ain't both dead right now."

"But we're together, dear, that's what counts."

"Sure, we're together, but are we dead or alive, that's what I want to know. Everything's different, ain't it? That canon's different, ain't it? And look at that cloud. Did you ever see a cloud like that when you was alive? It looks like it's made of tar.

"And where's Friday? Do you think he'd go off and desert us like this? The chances are, he's standin' right here lookin' at us and we can't see him. If you want my honest opinion, I think we're both dead. I feel kind of funny—all sort of a glowin' inside, and that ain't right, 'cause look how cold and wet it is! Do you think mebbe that black cloud's the world, and us are—somewhere else. And I can hear music, sort of, a long way off, and I feel happy.

and uplifted like I did one time at a revival meetin' at Snarlin' Gulch."

"That's queer," Margery said breathlessly. "I—I feel the same way, all glowing and—and happy. And everything seems to be whirling a little. What—what is that orchestra playing, dear? Do you hear it?"

Red Wilpin lifted his eyes and listened intently.

"It sounds like 'What'll I do?' to me."

The girl, too, listened. "No, dear, it's 'California, Here I Come!' I'm sure. I've danced to it so often! I wish we could dance now."

He smiled wistfully. "I sure would like to shake a leg. But this mud don't make a very good dance floor."

Margery suddenly covered her eyes with one hand. "Honey," she said faintly. "That one symptom is worse now. Everything is whirling terribly."

"Feel kind of sick to your stomach, Marge?"

"Yes!"

He reached down and picked up the empty brown bottle that floated in the water.

"Margie," he said, "we ain't dead. We ain't even dreamin'. Look at this here vicious article I hold in my hand. The only thing wrong with us is we ain't used to this cheap, synthetic stuff they peddle in Yumpa."

"You—you mean, Friday gave it to us while we were both unconscious?"

"Ayop! He must have gave each of us purty near half a pint!"

"Then we are alive!" she cried. "And look, dear! The rain has stopped!"

It was true. The rain had stopped. And now the air was filled with the roar of a mighty wind, a blast that might have issued from the throat of some Brobdingnagian trumpet, and there was in its deep-voiced note something that was ominous and sinister and threatening.

Hand in hand the lovers arose from the mud puddle. High above them, silhouetted starkly against the racing inky cloud, stood Friday Pepper. He was perched upon Sentry Rock, and he was wildly gesticulating to them.

"Come yere!" he shouted. "Somethin' turrible is about t' happen t' Yumpa!"

CHAPTER XL.

CATACLYSM.

HOW true his prediction was! Something terrible was about to happen to Yumpa, but not when considered in the light of law and order, and decency. It was as if the elements had grown righteously wrathful at this evil community that had so long flaunted itself in the countenance of moral progress, and were preparing now to assault it.

The cessation of the rain had left the air crystal clear and the three observers on Sentry Rock could see the notorious village as clearly and as in fine detail as if it were a photograph made with the rarest of lenses. A harsh yellow light illumined the scene with garish clarity.

The hurricane was sweeping down the valley in which Yumpa lay when Red Wilpin and Margery Corbin reached Sentry Rock and took their stand beside Friday Pepper. Flocks of birds, driven before that awful blast, tumbled about like scraps of dark paper. Limbs of trees and leaves, and a miscellany of rubbish likewise swept forward in a nondescript wave before that mighty blast.

Down in Yumpa the cottonwood trees were threshing from side to side in the on-rushing storm. One giant at the edge of the village was plucked out by the roots, as easily as a dentist removes a tooth with forceps. At the top of the precipice which rose sheerly behind the village on the east side, a clump of mesquite was torn free, and this went sliding down the wind.

Pebbles and clumps of dirt slid down the steep wall of the precipice and bounded upon the roofs of Yumpa. For a moment, a shower of mud obscured the watchers' view of the town, and all that could be seen was the slender white spire of the Yumpa church, pointing upward toward the storm, like a warning, admonitory finger.

Then the mist cleared away, and the denizens of Yumpa could be seen, huddled at windows, or clustered in panic-stricken

groups in the shelter of the clapboard buildings. The howl of the wind arose to a shriek. Another cottonwood went down. Mere earth cascaded down the precipice, and rebounded from Yumpa roofs.

Now the voice of the wind reached a pitch that was fairly beyond the register of the human ear. It was a force, a relentless mass moving with the speed of thought, a destroying spirit!

"Thar goes another cottonwood!" Friday screamed above the gale.

"Look!" Margery cried. "It's turning somersaults! Oh! It's smashed into the Chinese laundry!"

"Thar goes th' roof o' th' Busy Bee!" Friday howled, and they strained their eyes against the stiffening blast to watch the antics of the Busy Bee Lunchroom roof. It sailed off into the air as though it were a flat sheet of dun-colored paper. For a moment it remained in midair, as if it were a kite, then it yolplaned down on its edge, crumpling into a million tiny fragments which were plucked up by the screaming hurricane.

"Thar goes th' Grand Palace Hotel!" Friday shrilled.

They could see that notorious tavern leaning more and more in the wind, as if it were a house of cards being blown upon by a playfully destructive child. From its doors poured frightened refugees, and hardly had the last man emerged when, swaying drunkenly, the hotel collapsed!

A shower of gravel splashed down upon the stricken town from the side of the precipice.

The Busy Bee Lunch, already minus its roof, was the next building to blow down, then, in turn, Wun Lung Low's establishment was flattened, the grocery store slid drunkenly forward and collapsed in the street, and a row of private houses disintegrated, one falling against the other and accelerating the destruction. The last building on that side of the street was a portable garage; and this was whipped from the small touring car which it sheltered and rolled off grotesquely down the valley.

"Yumpa is doomed!" Friday shouted.

And it was true. Where the village of Yumpa had stood, only a tangled cluster of

boards rapidly being strewn by the hurricane, remained.

"The church is still standing!" Margery cried in Red Wilpin's nearer ear.

And through the debris tossed upward and onward by the hurricane, the slim, immaculate, white spire could still be glimpsed, still pointing toward the wind-swept clouds like a warning, admonitory finger!

Another shower of gravel and small stones was sprayed downward from the sheer slope of the precipice.

"Look!" the girl screamed. "That precipice is falling!"

"It cain't be!" Friday snapped. "Thar ain't been a landslide on that precipice fer goin' on thutty y'ars. Holy mackerell! It is a-comin' down!"

So slowly that its movement was all but imperceptible, the face of the towering precipice was moving outward—outward over Yumpa. And apparently the danger had been realized by those hapless creatures who clustered here and there about the wreckage, for they were running.

"Fire!" Larry yelled.

"Th' hull blame town's a goin' up in flames!" Friday shrilly affirmed. "I reckon their water supply system ain't goin' t' do 'em much good now!"

Smoke was pouring, it seemed, from every pile of wreckage, and angry yellow tongues were licking upward in growing volume.

Slowly the face of the precipice moved outward, and a great cleavage line could be seen, extending from the base to a point not a hundred feet from the crest. That incalculable mass was about to crush down upon Yumpa!

And now the refugees were streaming out of the town, some on horses, but the majority afoot.

"Ya cain't tell me that whut's happenin' down thar is accident," Friday cried. "It's retribution. Fer nigh onto a half century that thar town has been a sinkhole o' sin and corruption. Thar ain't no crime known to mankind whut ain't been committed in full measure, pressed down and boilin' over in that notorious community. Look! Th' church ain't been touched by th' flames!"

That shining white spire still pointed toward the inky cloud.

"Thar she comes!"

After having balanced for some seconds, seeming to defy the laws of gravity, the towering mass of gravel and rock plunged outward and down. Dead Man's Pass, a mile away, rumbled with the impact of it. A blossom of spray expanded into the air; it rose, billow upon billow, until the lower end of Yumpa Valley was obscured. Then the shattering detonation of its fall roared the length of the valley. The sound of that Titanic crash was caught up by the valley walls, by the mountain peaks, until the air thundered and shook with the echoed reverberation.

Presently the spray commenced to settle. It was Friday, with his mountain trained eyes, who made the discovery that plunged them all into awed, reverential silence.

"Th' church still stands!"

And it was so. That slim, gleaming white spire, untouched by hurricane, fire or avalanche, still pointed upward, a warning, admonitory finger.

"What has happened to those poor things?" Margery cried. "Where are they?"

"Wiped out, gal!"

"Oh, how horrible!"

"No, gal, not horrible, but just. All this jest goes t' show ya that th' way o' th' transgressor ain't hard—it's impossible. No man can live by committin' crimes and git away with it. He's shore t' be overtook by th' law o' compensation afore he gits very fur. That's whut happened t' that batch o' riffraff and offscourin'—overtook by th' law o' compensation. It shows ya, gal, that th' only life worth leadin' is a pure, clean, upright one. Thar ain't a man or a woman down thar who didn't deserve this yere fate!"

While he was speaking darkness had fallen. The black cloud from the east was now fairly overhead, and, as he paused, that cloud seemed to open.

"Cloudbust!" he shrilled.

Water seemed to descend into the valley of Yumpa, not as rain usually descends, but in a solid mass. It came crashing to earth

in a leaden lump, as if the bottom of a reservoir had suddenly given way.

"It is retribution!" Friday screamed. "Them cattle rustlers and hoss thieves and claim jumpers and desert rats and card sharps and dance-hall gals are gettin' their just deserts at last, gal! It's nothin' but th' old law of compensation cleanin' up th' odds and ends left by th' hurricane, the fire and th' landslide! It's th' avengin' hand o' justice! Well, it's easin' off now. Is th' leetle church still standin'?"

They stared into the unnatural darkness.

"I see it!" Margery cried excitedly. "Yes! It hasn't been touched!"

Dimly, between gusts of rain, the virtuous white spire of the little place of worship could be seen. Untouched by hurricane, fire, avalanche or cloudburst, that shining finger seemed to point its own moral—of peace, hope, and happiness.

"Ghosts!" Friday exclaimed. "Look at 'em a-comin'—all them ghosts! And they're a-comin' up yere!"

"You're seein' things, Friday," Red Wilpin snorted.

"Lock, I tell ya! Look down yonder through that split in th' rain! They're a-comin' hell fer leather! All them ghosts of hoss thieves and cattle rustlers and claim jumpers and desert rats and dance-hall gals. And—holy mackerel! There's th' ghosts o' them Easterners, too!"

It was an uncanny, a disturbing sight. Grayly, through the rain, they came, a panic-stricken procession.

"They ain't ghosts!" Larry proclaimed indignantly. "They're just as alive as we are!"

The trampling of many hoofs and scores of scurrying feet came up to Sentry Rock, and with these sounds of haste, the low moans of men and women—of men and women in the clutches of an unearthly terror. And upon the faces of all of them was stamped fear and horror, as if they had looked upon a thing not meant to be seen on this earth.

Pale, and muttering, they came. They scrambled up the slope into Dead Man's Pass, and they fled onward into the mists of the cañon, their moans rising to form a deep, sustained sob.

Julius Yost led that strange and hasty exodus from the Valley of Fear. Mounted on the blue roan he passed the watchers at a rapid canter without glancing to left or right. Some few yards behind him rode Mrs. Yost on a black mustang, her eyes seeming to bulge, her thin, cruel lips working rapidly. Next came Judge Oglethorpe, Marshal Sniffin, and Spavin Yampdon, with white, set faces, eyes a glitter, haste sitting upon them with roweled spurs. And not once did they glance to one side or other of the steep, narrow trail which led out of that inferno that was Yumpa.

In the next group, goading their horses onward, came Black Dan MacGillicuddy, Jim Rooney, and Big Sam Snarky, the water profiteers—the three most prominent business men of Yumpa. And in their white, startled faces was a look which implied that they would never return to this valley again.

Side by side, with heads and shoulders lowered to decrease the wind resistance, rode those two strong men who had been pals for thirty years, Karl the Killer and Gory Oliver.

A familiar throbbing note rose above the cries of the wounded, and out of the mist surged the small touring car with Wun Lung Low at the wheel, his celestial countenance twitching and gray with the horror he had been through. Perhaps he had braved floods and typhoons on the Yangtze-kiang, yet in his face was the expression of an Oriental who had been through an experience terrifying and strange and novel. With expert hands he toolled the flivver up the slope and through the pass. The horn screamed a warning, and the touring car, seeming to bound from rock to rock, passed the horses until it attained the head of the line.

Now came the pedestrians. Huddling in a cluster, as if for mutual protection and safety, they clawed their way up the slippery incline to Dead Man's Pass. Here were the weaklings, the men who did not fit in, the desert rats, the prospectors, and clinging to them were the dance hall girls, their spangled, gaudy dresses muddy and bedraggled, their eyes staring, their rouge startlingly red against their chalky cheeks. Frantic haste was in their movements, and panic was in their eyes.

"So long, Belle!" Friday shouted.

But Belle, the dance hall girl, paid no heed to that friendly adieu. With head down and elbows working, she plodded down the cañon, her red-heeled shoes twinkling, her taffy-colored hair streaming behind her.

One by one the refugees from the horror that had been Yumpa vanished into the mists of the cañon.

The three observers turned about. Where Yumpa had stood there was nothing to mark the spot but a sprawling mound of fresh gravel. Not a plank from one of those infamous structures could be seen.

Only one edifice remained. And as the clouds rolled back and the golden sunlight poured down into that stricken valley, the spotless white spire of the little church gleamed. Friday Pepper flung out a trembling hand and pointed with a gnarled forefinger.

"Yonder's what I mean," he declaimed in an awed voice. "Th' laws o' compensation are a workin'—always a workin'! Th' ways o' th' transgressor are made hard a purpose, and th' ways o' th' righteous man 're made easy."

Red Wilpin was looking anxiously about him.

"Say!" he gasped. "Where in Sam Hill is that there mail sack?"

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT WAS IN THE SACK.

THE three spectators hastened down the slope from Sentry Rock.

"Where was it last?" Larry demanded.

"Over thar by that pile o' cans!" Friday informed him.

"I was kneeling on it when I cooked breakfast," Margery affirmed. "It's simply vanished!"

"And we've got to find it," Larry decided grimly. "We've got to find that mail sack and deliver it to Rattlesnake Junction. The pay roll of th' Merry Wives of Windsor mine is in that mail sack, and I don't want to be clapped in jail for robbin' and tamperin' with the United States mails.

Before we c'n show our faces in civilization agin, that mail sack has got to be delivered to its destination!"

"Th' chances are," Friday put in gloomily, "that pack o' human vultures who come up yere and stripped you when you was a layin' that unconscious f'm th' lightnin' seen it and vamoosed with it. What 're we goin' to do, Red?"

"Look for it!" that young man snapped. "All the trouble we went to in gettin' them folks to sign that paper clearin' us of holding up the stage and jackin' up their water rates ain't worth a continental cuss to us now. Holdin' up stage coaches and sieglin' towns is harmless fun compared to monkeyin' with Uncle Sam. Scatter around now. Mebbe th' wind blew it up the cañon a ways. We ain't goin' to leave Dead Man's Pass until we locate that mail sack."

They separated, Larry going across the cañon, Friday, up the cañon, and Margery to the rocks scattered as if by a giant's hand on the other side of the standpipe.

And suddenly her voice was heard in a happy cry.

"I've found it! Here it is!"

Larry and Friday came running to where she was kneeling.

"Th' ligtnin' did that!" Friday exclaimed.

The mail sack had been ripped and torn; protruding fringes were scorched; it had been rolled up into a clumsy ball and tossed at least one hundred feet, rolling under an overhanging rock which had protected it from the deluge, for it was almost dry.

"Is the payroll of the Merry Wives o' Windsor mine in there?" Larry anxiously inquired.

Margery was trying to untangle the canvas ball. She laughed excitedly.

"Yes! I can feel it—a hard, flat lump in the center."

"Handle it gently, hon', and fer Pete's sake, don't tear or mutilate th' wrappin'. That mail sack, just as it is, has got to be in Rattlesnake Junction by mornin'."

With deft fingers Margery extricated the precious packet from the snarl of canvas. Three pairs of incredulous eyes stared at the large, flat package she had removed. Friday Pepper was the first to find his voice.

"That ain't money!" he gasped. "That there's a book: Ya shore that's all there is in the bag, Marge?"

She shook the tattered bag, but it divulged nothing more.

"Do ya mean t' tell me," Friday demanded wrathfully, "that we held up th' stage and went through hell and high water, and risked our lives time and agin—for a second class mail sack with a book in it! Wall, son," he went on indignantly, "you kin have th' privilege and th' honor of deliverin' that mailsack to Rattlesnake Junction. Ya kin jest count me out."

Margery was scrutinizing the name on the wrapper.

"Why!" she cried softly. "It's addressed to you, Larry! It's a—it's a—"

"I know what it is," the young man snarled. "It's a mail order catalogue I sent for two weeks ago. Throw the fool thing away. I ain't interested in buyin' anything."

"Wait a minute," Friday protested. "Afore ya throw it away, let me look at th' pitchers."

"Let's not throw it away at all," the girl suggested softly. "Maybe—well, who knows?"

Red Wilpin arose slowly to his feet. That sentimental note no longer struck a responsive chord. Sourly, he looked down at his professed sweetheart and his ancient and faithful retainer.

"I don't know what I'm a goin' to do," he announced bitterly, "but I sure ain't a goin' to repeat the mistakes I've been makin' in the last couple o' days. All that's happened to me has been just one long series o' misfortunes. I ain't got an ideal left. You see standin' before you one mighty disillusioned man. What have I got?"

"You've got me," Margery said wistfully.

"Wait a minute," he snapped. "Aside from acquirin' a fiancée who ain't done a doggoned thing from start to finish but get me into one kettle o' hot water after another—"

"But you love me, don't you, Larry?"

"I ain't talkin' about love. I'm speakin' about what I've got. When I get through

estimatin' what you're worth, well, what have I? Yesterday mornin'—and it seems like some time last century to me—I got the bright idea of stickin' up th' stage coach, so I could catch me some saxophone lessons from old Doc Saunders over here in Yumpa. And th' fust thing I hear when I git to Yumpa is that Doc Saunders was killed in a knife fight.

"As if that ain't enough misfortune, then I go and play the wheel and shoot some dice, and I clean up enough money to fix me nice and cozy for a couple o' years. Then I fix up a scheme to make a killin' by puttin' a good, stiff water tax on Yumpa. And I acquire me a nice Swiss watch that tinkles off the time when you press a little button.

"Well, what have I got out of it? I'm stripped! My watch is gone, my roll is gone; somebody even took off of me the silk bandanna I bought down at Cheyenne. There ain't any justice in the world, that's what I'm a tryin' to tell you! I've been too lenient, that's the whole trouble. I've been too kind and generous to folks. From now on I'm goin' to quit bein' just kind o' bad; I'm goin' to turn *real* bad. And havin' you along sure does complicate matters, Margie."

She looked at him coldly. "I haven't any use for a whiner, and that's what you are—now, Larry Wilpin. I should think you'd have sense enough to realize, after seeing what happened to those unfortunate wretches down there, that crime in any form does not pay. Until yesterday, you were a simple, honest mountaineer. You've proved to every one's satisfaction but your own that banditry is poorly paid."

"You wait 'till I git started!"

"You aren't going to get started. You're going back to your farm and—make it pay! And I'm going back there with you and make a comfortable home for you. What you need is a firm, guiding hand. And I've got it. You're a bright young man, but you change your mind too often."

"You shore spoke a mouthful then, gal," Friday put in feelingly.

Red Wilpin turned on him. "What have you got to say about it?" he snapped. "A fine business man you are! I send you

down to Yumpa to collect my water tax for me and—where is it?"

"Right yere in my pockets," Friday replied stiffly. "Durned near five thousand bucks in water taxes."

He produced handfuls of green and yellow bills; and Red Wilpin sank weakly upon a rock after taking possession of the cash.

"Friday," he said faintly. "We've got just one boss between us. That's that little buckskin o' mine. He's a wanderin' around somewhere behind the water tank. You fetch him. I got some real important business to discuss with Margie here."

When Friday had gone in quest of the buckskin, Larry turned to the girl. Color had flowed into her cheeks. Her dark eyes seemed to sparkle as she looked up at him, and her lips were curved in a smile.

"Margie," he said sternly, "you and I have been through a whole lot in the last day or so—since we met."

"Yes, Larry."

"You know what a mean, low-down, or-
ery, hot-headed, hard-boiled cuss I am. I've said things to you that you ought to have slapped me good for. I reckon somebody ought to take me out and beat me up proper. What I'm a drivin' at is, you sort of know just about what I am."

She nodded.

"And lookin' at you standin' there, so cute and purty and all, it's just come over me in the last few minutes what ailed that farm o' mine. It's been lackin' the refinin' influence of a pure, noble woman. There's a minister in that little white church down there: and it seems like to me that he's been spared through hurricane, landslide, fire and cloudburst for the particular purpose of marrin' us.

"I'm a rich man now. I've got five thousand dollars of honest, hard-earned money right here in my pockets, and one o' these days I aim to be the richest man in the State. Give us a kiss, kid, and let's go down there and get spliced."

Red Wilpin removed his lips from those of his fiancée as Friday led the buckskin up.

"Wall," the old mountaineer said briskly, "when 're we a goin' t' start banditing in real earnest?"

"We ain't," his employer replied, "we're goin' back to dry farmin'. I've done changed my mind!"

CHAPTER XLII.

LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

WITH Margery Corbin riding the buckskin, and Friday Pepper and Red Wilpin afoot, they proceeded down the valley of Yumpa to the edge of the gravel slide beneath which the most notorious town of the old Southwest was lying in charred and splintered ruins.

Red Wilpin carried the mail order catalogue in his hands. And as he walked he thumbed the pages. Occasionally he muttered.

"Fifteen thutty-five! Whut in Sam Hill do you know about that, Margie? Only fifteen thutty-five for a genuine quail and cuckoo clock that strikes every quarter hour! I'll have to get us one of them, Marge. It 'll bring back that Jerginson of mine, sort of."

"Is there anything about girls' clothing in that catalogue, Larry? Every stitch I own is on."

Her lover flipped a few hundred pages.

"Right here, kid! 'Dresses of wonderful style and value for full figgers! Only seventeen ninety-five.' It says here: 'As evidence o' the expert workmanship we have lavished on this frock you will appreciate the ample sweep and perfect fitting lines afforded by the slightly gathered fullness in the back of the skirt. Thutty-eight to fifty-two inches bust measure.' And it don't cost but—"

"I have not a full figure," Margery interrupted stiffly. "I am a perfect thirty-six."

"Sure, you are, Margie! I was lookin' at th' wrong page. Here it is! Sizes fer misses and juniors. 'The true excellence of these styles is not to be measured by their low price.' Here's jest the dress you're lookin' for, hon. 'Artistic motifs, hand embroidered in purty wool yarns, lend a smartly youthful touch to th' collar, cuffs and tailored pockets. All wool French serge. Shipping weight, two pounds. And the price ain't but five ninety-eight. Now, I call that

reasonable. And it's a real handsome lookin' garment. Ain't it elegant, Friday?"

The aged mountaineer looked and sniffed.

"Shore, it's elegant—if ya aim t' throw yore money around just like so much water!"

"I wouldn't be found dead in it," Margery announced, "and as for letting you men do my shopping, you can close that book right now, Larry Wilpin!"

Larry tucked the catalogue under his arm. They were nearing the little white church. A benevolent old man with snowy hair and rosy cheeks was standing on the lower steps.

"Welcome, friends!" he greeted them.

"This little gal, here," Larry informed him, "is my fiancée. We're a honin' to be spliced, *padre*. Do you reckon you can fix us up?"

The pastor of the Yumpa church beamed upon them.

"My children," he said in his fine, old voice, "I think it is only meet and fitting to celebrate the death of an old era of vice and corruption and the birth of a new dawn of hope and peace and prosperity by uniting the two of you in holy matrimony. Will you come in?"

The four entered the little church. And there, in the very shadow of the gravel mound beneath which lay the torn and twisted ruins of Yumpa, Lawrence Wilpin and Margery Corbin were married.

When the ceremony was over and the bride had been kissed not only by her husband, but by the minister and Friday Pepper, they went out on the step and sat down in the warm afternoon sunshine—Margery in the middle, Friday on her left and Larry on her right.

With heads together, they pored over the pages of the catalogue.

"Yere they are!" Larry announced excitedly. "'Mother o' pearl keys, comes fitted with rubber mouthpiece, nickel plated reed holder and mouthpiece cap, music lyre, braided strap with metal snap. Silver plated, satin finish, gold plated bell, keys and engravin' gold plated and burnished. And only one hundred and nine dollars and forty-five cents fer a genuine C melody saxophone! That's mine!"

"How about pianos, dear? You'll want me to accompany you, won't you?"

"Shore! Yere's one that plays itself, hon'! Made fer discriminatin' people—that's us. Comes complete with twenty rolls o' music. Ten dollars down and fifteen a month. And only five ninety-eight twenty-six! And while we're a wanderin' around in th' music department, I reckon we better catch us a phonograph, kid. Yere's a dandy fer fifty-nine eighty-five! Make a note o' that, hon'! And don't fergit that cuckoo clock!"

Oh, looky, Margie! Yere's jest what I've been cravin' fer years. A real all-wool bathrobe—only four ninety-eight! And yere's th' men's clothin' and furnishin' department. 'It pays to dress well and it pays to buy yere!' Yere's a fancy all-wool serge in a nifty dark brown stripe fer seventeen sixty-five! And jest the shoes I've been lookin' for! Say, ain't these books wonderfull! How come I never saw one before? How long has this been goin' on?"

"Afore ya spend all that thar money," Friday put in sourly, "how about some things we're goin' t' need? How about saddles, bridles, hackamores, plows, harrows, cultivators, seed and sech like?"

Red flipped to page 1053. "Yere they are, Friday! A genuine Minadoka stock saddle fer thnny-nine fifty. Twenty-hair stran front cinches, three and a half inch belting web rear cinch! Whut snappier saddle could ya ask fer? And yere's a bridle fer four ninety-five, a curry comb fer eighteen cents, and a boss blanket fer three ninety-five. And yere's plows and cream separators and farm lightin' plants.

"Say, ain't them dishes purty, hon'? We'll have to get a set o' them. Only one fifty-nine! Ain't things cheap in this book! I never heard of sech bargains! Honey, we sure are goin' to have a picnic furnishin' in that house of ours."

He opened the catalogue at random.

"Margie!" he gasped. "Speakin' o' bargains, jest look at this! Yere's a beautiful royal blue enameled perambulator with rubber tired wheels fer only ten ninety-eight!"



"We Want Mabel!"

By **FRED MACISAAC**

THE eyes of the nation were on Mabel Mainwaring when she landed in New York. A dozen of the best known baseball writers met her at the pier. As she was as English as a kippered herring, youthful and beautiful and totally ignorant of America, such a situation would have caused surprise if it didn't happen that the twenty-two years old Britisher was the sole heir of old Bill Moody, and she had inherited the Bolton Baseball Club of the National League, popularly known as the Zulus.

What would she do with her inheritance, to a girl of her type and training as undesirable as a white elephant? That was what the nation wished to know and that was what the reporters were there to find out.

"What do you intend to do with the ball club?" asked Pop Bloom, of the *Sphere*.

"Operate it, of course."

"But you can't know anything about baseball, Miss Mainwaring."

"Is it so different from cricket?"

The girl looked displeased at the burst of laughter which her innocent question pro-

voked. She tossed her blond locks, turned her back, and ended the interview, but they had heard enough.

When the papers appeared next day, from one end of the continent to the other went up a rude, rough, uproarious bellow. Immediately the Zulus became the Cricketers. Now the fans understood why they always came in last in the league: they played cricket instead of baseball.

Pictures of the girl magnate accompanied her innocent inquiry, and they made the sporting pages beautiful for once. Miss Mainwaring was one of those rare and exquisite blondes which flourish in the dewy land of Britain. Tall, rather athletic in build, graceful, glowing with vitality, blue eyes extra size, lashes long and black, teeth which would make a dentist commit suicide, complexion pink and white like a baby's, she was the loveliest thing that ever set a number five shoe on a New York dock.

Down in Oakville, Alabama, Crab McNulty read the interview with the new boss of the Zulus and gnashed his teeth in spleen. Bad enough to be manager of the

worst club in the big league, trying desperately to make a lot of spavined old timers and half baked youngsters knit together into a ball team, without a yellow haired British chicken bringing ridicule and contumely upon his outfit. He knew that they were going to be called the "cricketers" before the sporting editors got started.

"I suppose we'll serve tea at the end of the seventh inning, and the outfield will be dropping as many 'aiches' as they do flies," he growled to Bill Blake, the second baseman.

"Yes, and if she finds out your views on the Irish Free State, you'll get your ticket the day she arrives. Better tell her you are an Orangeman."

This brought forth the string of profanity that Blake intended, and McNulty stamped away to his own room.

Miss Mainwaring wired McNulty immediately after her arrival in New York that she would join the team at Oakville within a few days.

"I expect the Bolton team to win the trophy this year," she said in her message, "so please arrange to have the best players possible."

Having fired her opening shot she settled back in her comfortable hotel room and ordered tea and muffins.

Old Bill Moody's sister had married an Englishman; Mabel was born in London, her parents were both dead, she had never visited America, never seen a game of baseball, had forgotten the existence of an American uncle when she learned that she was his heir.

As the young woman had reached the last few hundred pounds of her scanty patrimony she was overjoyed at her good fortune, hastened to close up her affairs in London, which were few, and took the first boat possible for America. The lawyer had informed her that Moody had left nothing but his baseball franchise and a ten years' lease on the Bolton park, the rent of which was paid for one year. To realize from her inheritance she must turn the team, which was barely making expenses, into a winner, in which case she could sell it for a very large sum, perhaps a million dollars, otherwise her fortune would not amount to much.

Being a courageous, intelligent and enterprising young woman she had determined to manage her inheritance. On the steamer she picked up from willing Americans whom she met some smattering of information about the national game, and she had learned just what a pathetic, forlorn, hopeless and futile outfit were her baseball players.

"We shall change all that," she had declared confidently, and tossed her blond bobbed head at their incredulous smiles.

It was a bright, cheerful April morning when she reached Oakville, entered the hotel and demanded a sitting-room and bedroom. She had been expected. One or two local reporters were on hand and a camera man, while the clerk beamed delightedly and called her by name.

"I wish to see Mr. McNulty immediately," she told the man behind the desk.

"He's out to the ball park with the players."

"Is it possible to send for him?"

"Yes, miss. I'll phone out there for you."

She moved serenely toward her room, while a phone message caused the manager to turn the team over to Captain Blake and proceed to the hotel.

He found his boss in a big armchair by the window, smoking a cigaret in a long ivory holder. Most men would have been dazzled by her loveliness, but Crab saw only a meddling female, and an English one at that.

"I'm McNulty," he mumbled. "What do you want?"

"How do you do?" she greeted him, extending a long slim hand.

He took it dubiously in his hairy paw and dropped into a chair near by.

"And how are my athletes to-day?" she inquired.

Crab looked surprised. "Athletes! If you mean that bunch of bums out at the ball park, they are terrible."

"Really? And why do you employ terrible people?"

"Best we can get."

"If you were to discharge them all and secure others, wouldn't it be an improvement?"

"For Heaven's sake, marm. You can't pick up ball players the way you hire waiters."

"No; I suppose not. Are you going to win the trophy this year?"

"No, marm. We're lucky if we come in seventh. Eighth and last is our usual berth."

"So I am informed. If we were to have a new team we could not be any more disgraced, could we?"

"Sure. Occasionally the Zulus win a game, and they often give the other teams a run for their money. If we couldn't play ball at all they'd throw us out of the league."

"Indeed. Where are you most weak, in bowlers?"

"Bowlers! For God's sake! We don't play cricket."

"Do you have to use such strong language? I meant throwers—no, pitchers."

"Say, lady, you don't know anything about baseball, do you?"

"I know that under your management the club has brought up the rear of the association for four years."

"Sure, rub it in. And that's exactly where we'll be this year."

"Really? That is a dreadful frame of mind for a manager. You should be the inspiration of your team. You should aim for first position, and never give up fighting. Carry on, as it were."

"Gimminy Moses, ain't you the little sunshine? Say, lady, you don't know what you're up against. If you have a couple of hundred thousand to buy players that won't strike out every time they get up against a good pitcher, and that can catch a hard hit ball, if you could even buy a pitcher that could put one over the plate faster than one of them Alabama trains you came down on, I might pin on a button with 'Excelsior' written on it, but with what we've got now, say, you just make me laugh. I don't believe we could beat an English baseball team, if you got any over there."

"What's the matter with our players?"

"This team is starved. Every time I developed a good player old Moody sold him to the Yankees. All we got are old timers that the other teams fired, or tramps

we got in the draft after the wealthy teams bought all the good ones."

"I haven't any money, Mr. McNulty. I thought if we won the trophy—"

"Pennant, lady, please say pennant."

"Pennant, then, I might sell the club and return home. They tell me baseball clubs sell for a million dollars."

"Championship clubs, not tail-enders."

"Oh, I see. There is quite a distinction, isn't there?"

"You bet you. Now I tell you what you do. Go off somewhere, and forget about this club. We'll go right along the way we always do, and maybe I can pick up a good man or two that'll help us pull out of the cellar. We might have a good year and make some money, you never can tell, and when there is anything I want to consult you about, I'll just write you a letter."

Crab was very earnest and eager, but he was silenced by a cold gleam from the big blue eyes.

"It is my intention to accompany my team everywhere and, by my presence, inspire my men."

"Say, you'll raise hell with the young sellers if you stick around, but you'll never make them play any better. Go away, lady, please go away."

"If you suggest my departure again I'll be compelled to dispense with your services."

"You will, hey? And what will you do without a manager?"

She smiled, a cold satirical smile which would have floored anybody but Crab.

"End in eighth place, just the same as you expect to do," she informed him. "Now, Mr. McNulty, I want to meet the players this afternoon and speak to them. And please keep saying to yourself the phrase of the French philosopher and healer, 'Every day, in every way, we are getting better and better.'"

"Oh, my Lord!" exclaimed Crab in anguish as he started for the door.

II.

The doings of the girl owner gave the press men much to amuse the public during the next few days. Ordinarily the Bolton

team attracted no reportorial gallery, but several of the best men in the business were shifted by their editors to Oakville to follow her around.

How the nation laughed when she called Spike Dugan, the left-handed pitcher, to her box at the ball park after the game and said to him earnestly:

"Mr. Dugan, I think I have discovered why the batters hit your throws so readily. If you would hurl the ball with your right hand, instead of your left, I am sure you could pitch better."

"He would pitch just as well," was the reportorial conclusion.

The day she proposed that they use cricket bats instead of what they were swinging with, on the ground that, being wider, they were more likely to meet the ball, was a red letter occasion for the scribes, and her Couéism as applied to a ball team hit the risibilities of everybody.

They photographed her at every opportunity. Her pictures crowded the prize fighters off the sporting pages. She was always referred to as Mabel, a courtesy in the news columns which she soon accepted without protest.

The attitude of the team was a curious mixture of humiliation and pride. The boys loved her for her sweetness, ingenuousness, and her gorgeous, flamboyant beauty, and they were ashamed of her, and of themselves, for the ridicule she was bringing down upon them all.

But Mabel was learning baseball. She was at the park early and late, she talked continuously to McNulty, driving him mad with her absurd suggestions, but causing him to drive his team harder than he had done in years.

The Zulus had been beaten so long that their attitude was one of hopelessness. They went into a game expecting to be licked, and they got what they expected. The fight had been knocked out of them, their work was perfunctory.

"What's the use" represented the way they fielded, ran bases, pitched and hit. McNulty knew that his young players were the dregs of the minor leagues, he expecting nothing from them and did not try hard to get anything from them.

The old players were conserving their powers, sparing themselves, hoping to last longer in the big game. They took no unnecessary chances.

But the radiant, cheerful blonde who smiled down on them during their practise began to have an effect on them. What is called an old man in baseball is a doddard of thirty-five, and at thirty-five one is not immune to the lure of big blue eyes and bright golden hair. The old boys, unconsciously, began to hump themselves. The youngsters burned to become distinguished for Mabel's sake.

The day that big Harry Jones stole second marked the regeneration of the team. The catcher was so surprised to see him start that he held the ball a fraction of a second too long and Harry beat it to the base by a daring slide which brought Mabel to her feet screaming, "Well done, Mr. Jones," while Crab McNulty's eyes stuck out of his head.

That same afternoon Frank Glenn, the third baseman, threw himself sidewise after a long foul fly, and came up with it in his right glove. Five years before, on the Boston Red Sox, he had made such catches.

Such incidents continued. The Crab, who had one of the keenest baseball brains in the business, began to lie awake nights devising new plays. The pitchers steamed up, but the batters kept pace with them.

The youngsters took to going out to the park an hour or two before regular practise to work up their batting. And then a little college recruit who Crab McNulty had ignored up to this time got a chance in a practise game and shut the regulars out with a curiously deceptive delivery.

He came from a small Southern college and was hanging around, paying his own expenses for an opportunity to make the team. Crab went over, after the third inning, and stood behind the catcher in an effort to fathom the mystery. He saw the ball do fantastic things, and he couldn't understand how it was done.

Harry Hosmer, of the New York *Eagle*, dropped into town a few afternoons later and astonished the country next day by declaring that Mabel had a good ball club which might burn up the league.

Nobody was so astonished as the Cricketers; they were still accepting themselves at the popular estimate, but Hosmer spoke with authority. If he said they were good, they were good.

Crab began to give out interviews predicting that he would finish in the first division, but Mabel caused a general laugh when she declared she intended to win the pennant.

"Don't you think we shall?" she asked the college pitcher, whose name was Wendell Greening. She had been showing him especial favors since his auspicious début, walking with him in the evening frequenting ice cream parlors and the town movie house in his company.

The youth shook his head.

"I think it extremely doubtful. Why do you expect such a thing the first year you own the team?"

"Because I need money so badly. I have a grandmother in England who has barely enough to live on. I hoped to do so much for her when I came into my inheritance, and then I found this old ball club only earned fifteen hundred dollars over its expenditures last season. That won't pay my own expenses traveling with the team.

Greening laughed a little.

"Miss Mainwaring, being English, you don't appreciate the value of exploitation. This team is going to make a barrel of money this year, no matter where it winds up, and you are going to be the cause. All this newspaper notoriety which you hate is making you a national figure. You are going to be a box office attraction. In the big cities huge crowds will turn out to see you instead of the players. Tailend teams with a single great player have often drawn bigger crowds than very good teams without stars.

"You are the greatest star in baseball to-day. Only you must let them see you. You must sit on the bench with the players. You must appear to be running the team. You might carry a cricket bat, anything to make talk. Even this new name we have, the 'Cricketers,' is going to create interest. I wouldn't be surprised if you made an awful lot of money, really."

"You wish me to exhibit myself like a

circus woman, go out on the field, mingle with the players before crowds of people—oh, I couldn't do that."

"Not even to make sixty or eighty thousand dollars. That's a movie star's salary. I know it's hard for a lady to make an exhibition of herself, but isn't the prize worth it?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I was thinking of asking those nice reporters to stop photographing me."

"For Heaven's sake don't! And lately you have learned so much about baseball you have stopped making funny breaks. You mustn't drop out of the news. Let's think up some good ones, you and I."

Her eyes danced, they put their heads together, and next day Mabel began again to say readable things.

First she suggested that the players should wear flannel trousers instead of knee breeches. Then she suggested several coaching expressions instead of the abuse which Crab McNulty showered on opposing players.

"Mabel wants Cricketers to be polite on coaching lines," was one of the best stories of the year.

III.

MEANTIME the team left the training camp and began its spring barnstorming tour. The men were on their toes, their listlessness had vanished and they cleaned up neatly in the exhibition games. Greening's mystery ball was responsible for his winning his games with ease. The old-timers were hitting the ball hard.

The batting eye is the last thing a player loses. He may get too fat to run bases, too rheumatic to sprint after grounders, but he can lace them out always if he ever knew how.

The early spring exhibition tour had usually resulted in a financial loss for the Zulus. The Cricketers made a very neat profit as a result of the crowds who turned out for a glimpse of Mabel.

The girl had balked at sitting with the team or being in any way active, but sharp eyes ferreted her, out in her front row box at every town.

And then the Cricketers came to New

York to play the opening game with the Giants. It was a cold, raw April day, there had been a slight rain in the morning and the indications were for a slim attendance.

To the amazement of the management the grounds were mobbed. Nearly forty thousand people paid their way in. And before the game started there began in the bleachers a tramping of feet and a monotonous chant which gradually spread to the grand stand and soon the whole multitude was stamping and shouting in unison:

"We want Mabel! We want Mabel!"

A mob must be humored. The manager of the Giants sought her out and led her, blushing and laughing, down into the field. There was a mad burst of applause, loud cries of:

"Oh, you Mabel!"

"Yum, yum."

"Peaches and cream."

"How's cricket?"

Mabel kissed her hands to the crowd, which continued to shower her with kindly witticisms until she had returned to her box, and then the game opened.

It was a wonderful game. "Mystery Man" Greening went into the box for the Cricketers after the Giants had retired the first three batters for the Bolton team in order. Though it was his first big game the boy was cool as ice.

Stimulated by the crowd, by the presence of Mabel, by their unusual pitching, the Boltons played like champions. When the Giants did reach Greening's delivery, their raps were smothered by the infield, two of whom were old Giant discards, while the green outfield had little or nothing to do.

The crowd was all for Mabel and her hired men. They booed their own team, cheered every good play made by the Boltons, invited Mabel to go out and knock a home run, and in such manner enjoyed themselves. The game reached the seventh inning without a run being scored on either side.

With the air-tight pitching of Greening, only bad errors on the part of the Cricketers could let in runs and the rejuvenated tail-enders were not making any. In the first of the eighth big Harry Jones caught a wide

curve on the end of his bat and jogged around the bases in a leisurely manner while a fan in the back of the center field bleachers put the ball in his pocket.

Amid the pandemonium a reporter heard Mabel exclaim in her high-pitched English voice:

"That's cricket!"

It wasn't, but the remark headed several of the accounts of the game next day, for there was no more scoring.

The Cricketers broke even with the Giants on the series and continued on their way, the best advertised team in the league. Playing way beyond their form, they continued to win games, and at the end of a fortnight, when they returned to Bolton they were in third place.

IV.

THE downtrodden fans of Bolton were frantic with joy. After years of hopelessness, at last, they had a team. With a big brass band, they met the players at the railroad station, tied ropes to the automobile containing Mabel and Crab McNulty, and dragged it to the Grand Hotel, where a big banquet had been prepared. The mayor was there, a couple of members of Congress and all the baseball enthusiasts of the city. The souvenirs were little cricket bats.

Mabel delivered an address over which she and Greening had labored the night before in the train, which was full of innocent errors, Anglicisms and guilelessness which caused the diners to roar with delight and merriment, and which amused the whole country next day. By this time the girl was as keen and intelligent a follower of the game as any, but her act required the other sort of thing.

During the next few weeks the Cricketers slipped a little. Aside from Greening, the pitching staff was very second rate, and the veterans were beginning to lose their steam. They landed in fourth place, but the article of baseball they were putting up still looked gilt edged to the Boltonians.

Greening had won ten straight games, no one had solved his curious system of delivering the ball, and the "mystery ball"

it remained. Mabel and the young pitcher were inseparable away from the ball park, and the other young players who had been fascinated by her charms had given up hope of interesting her. Then came an offer from Chicago. Fifty thousand dollars cold cash for the mystery pitcher.

When McNulty showed her the telegram he wore a cynical smile. He knew what old Moody would have done under the circumstances. The girl's eyes flashed.

"Never," she exclaimed. "Why, it would ruin my team."

"Lady," replied the manager, "this team is headed for last place. Greening may keep us out of it for a month or two longer, but we can't stand the pace, we're cracking already in two or three places. Better take the money the way your uncle used to do. Remember, it's a great chance for the kid."

"Oh," said the girl, her expression softening suddenly. "I had not thought of it that way."

"You're sweet on him, ain't you?"

"Most certainly not. Only I hate to stand in the way of any young man's ambition."

"Well, if you don't sell him, he'll probably crack like the rest of the team before the end of the season, and lose his big chance."

"What is your interest in selling him, Mr. McNulty?"

"Well, Moody used to give me ten per cent on all sales. I suppose you will do the same."

"I see. Well, if I sell him you shall have your blood money."

She walked scornfully away:

That night she sat in the hotel parlor and talked with Greening.

He handed the telegram back to her.

"I stick with you, Miss Mabel. If you want the money, sell me. If you want to keep the team in the fight I am satisfied."

"Isn't it your big chance?"

"My biggest chance is being with you. I'd sooner work for three thousand dollars a year with the Cricketers, see you every day, than get ten thousand dollars a year from the Cubs and not be with you."

Mabel blushed very prettily and turned

her big eyes upon the rug causing her long black lashes to hide them from the ardent young pitcher.

"You are drawing big money at the gate just now," he continued, "but pretty soon the papers are going to get tired of playing you up. The reporters are getting wise already that you are not so innocent of the game as you pretend. The players are slowing up; there were five errors behind me in my last game and I only won by good luck. Your infield is the slowest in the big league and your outfield is fast, but can't hit. You have only one decent catcher, and if he should get injured, blooey go your chances. Aside from my trick ball, you haven't a pitcher who can win with a weak hitting team behind him, and the fans will stop turning out for our games pretty soon. In a sense McNulty is right; we are headed for last place as usual."

"No," she said, stamping her foot. "I won't have it. I will buy players. Do you know that there is sixty thousand in the treasury already?"

"Fine! If you sell me, you will have a hundred and ten thousand dollars and will probably make another ten or fifteen thousand the rest of the season. On the strength of our showing this year you can probably sell your franchise for a hundred thousand and retire with a fortune."

"Pooh!" she retorted. "The only thing that makes me hesitate is whether I am doing you an injustice."

"I want to work for you," he told her. "Nothing else matters to me."

"Then you shall," she declared, smiling radiantly. "Write a telegram, signing my name, that they can't have you for a million."

Mabel's sportsmanship in refusing to sell her star increased her popularity in Bolton tenfold. When she paid ten thousand dollars for a shortstop who could really play the position, the increased business at home repaid her the purchase price in a week.

Greening continued to win his games, and her other pitchers turned in one win in three. One of the outfielders developed a batting streak and the Cricketers started on the road in fourth place, which they held by a narrow margin.

But Greening's prediction in regard to her celebrity proved to be true. Mabel was no longer red-hot news, and the attendance on tour, though far greater than the Boltons had drawn for many years, was nothing like as large as on the first trip.

The team won half its games and returned home with a better hold on fourth position. McNulty was still without hope and shook his head sadly when he looked at his growing list of cripples which included one of his regular fielders and Jones, his first baseman. He was compelled to put a pitcher on first.

Predictions that Greening, who had won sixteen and lost two games, would soon be sold were rife. Something had to be done, and soon, too.

"We need a catcher, a pitcher and a center fielder who can hit three hundred to stay in the first division," McNulty told his owner, "but it would take a fortune to buy the men I want."

"And I have an idea," declared Mabel, "that we are going to get them."

"What are you going to use for money?"

"Those funny pieces of green paper your government issues. I have decided to sell forty-nine per cent of the club for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, put the stock on the market here, make it a patriotic campaign, popular subscription, guaranteeing to spend all the money in buying good players."

"Not so bad," McNulty admitted grudgingly. "The town is baseball mad, the idea of a championship team next year might appeal to them. Whose notion is it, Greening's?"

"I talked it over with him," she said, coloring slightly.

"I thought so. Well, we'll call a meeting of newspaper editors and prominent fans and see how the proposition strikes them. Matter of fact, if we built up the team so it made a fight for the championship you could sell it for more than a million and your stockholders would get a hundred per cent on their investment."

"I don't sell the team. I play the game," proclaimed Mabel. "That's cricket."

"Cricket may be a good game at that," McNulty said with a whimsical grin.

The meeting was held, and Mabel laid her program before the assembly of about forty prominent business and newspaper men. For a moment it looked as though it would go over with a bang, and then it struck a snag. Jefferson Heighton, a bank president and enthusiastic fan, climbed to his feet and coughed.

"Miss Mainwaring," he said, "your idea does you credit, but it doesn't follow, if you get this money and expend it for players, that you will have a championship club. There are teams in the league with ten times your resources who can always outbid you. They are making a drive now for your star pitcher, Mr. Greening, whom I see here today. Eventually, they will make offers which will compel you to accept, or if you refuse, Greening will feel injured and refuse to play ball. With Greening and several good players purchased as you suggest, you might win the championship next year. But how can you guarantee to hold him? You can't."

Mabel rose to her feet, a flush in her cheeks, her eyes shining brightly. She glanced at Greening, a glance which caused his eye to kindle.

"Can I not?" she inquired. "Mr. Greening, before this company, I ask you if you will honor me by becoming my husband."

There was an astonished silence, then a chuckle from some one, then a wild burst of laughter. Mabel was indeed inimitable.

Greening climbed to his feet, crimson as a rose. He threw a reproachful look at the girl who was regarding him confidently. It was the most embarrassing moment of his life.

"That's one way to keep a pitcher," a rude person was heard to exclaim.

The pitcher set his jaw and his eye flashed.

"Do you love me, Mabel?" he demanded.

She tossed her head defiantly at the throng.

"I do," she answered firmly.

He strode to her side and caught her hand.

"Then I refuse your proposal, and make you a counter one. Will you marry me?"

"Most assuredly."

"Will you get out of baseball, sell me to one of the clubs that want me, and leave Bolton forever?"

Mabel smiled at him. "If you really wish it."

"Well, I don't," he declared. "I was just showing you fellows that this is a love match and not a scheme to sell stock. Now that you know I stay with the Bolton team, who makes the first subscription?"

"Put me down for ten thousand," said the bank president, who had raised the original objection. "You don't have to convince me any further."

Amid general laughter the meeting sub-

scribed two-thirds of the total amount of stock offered for sale. To secure the remainder would be a simple matter.

And that's how Bolton got lifted from the cellar of the league to the proud position of a championship team. Mabel finished third that season and, starting the next year where she left off, won the championship and the world's series.

But as she sat in her box watching her husband pitch her team to victory, she really devoted more attention to a small bundle she held in her arms, Mabel Mainwaring Greening, future owner of the Cricketers.

THE END



SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

OH, peace has its glories, but we go where gore is,
 Wherever there's trouble you find us about,
 For war caught us early, and war's hurly-burly
 Has got in our blood and we can't get it out.
 We view with resentment all calm and contentment,
 We love the fierce tumult that rolls to the stars,
 Let other men follow the trail of Apollo
 Or trot after Venus—but we follow Mars!

The magic of Cupid to us seems but stupid,
 Minerva's a pendant, and Bacchus a bum.
 The spell of the muses is one that soon loses
 Its hold on a man when the bugle-calls come.
 Red war! It is muddy and ugly and bloody,
 It racks and it maims you and leaves you with scars,
 Its honors are hollow—but somehow we follow
 Not lyric Apollo, but truculent Mars!

The trail that will take us to any old fracas
 In any old spot is the trail that we hit.
 Wherever men trifle with cannon or rifle
 We like to be present and doing our bit!
 Existence is zestless in peace, we are restless,
 We burn like a panther that's penned behind bars,
 We're slaves of adventure, and though the world censure
 We march to the music of militant Mars!

Berton Braley.

8 A



Hopalong Cassidy's Pal

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IX—THE MAKIN'S

THE fire sputtered and hissed and would have been drowned but for the fact that it was built on a little rise of ground. Huddled under a brush wickiup, covered with their slickers and blankets, Mesquite Jenkins and Lanky Smith sat watching the flames, occasionally tossing a stick of firewood on them.

All night long it had rained in sheets and the murmuring rill they had camped beside now rushed turbulently past in the faint radiance of the fire, swishing and gurgling, and steadily climbing up its banks. The sound of the driving rain on the leaves overhead made a monotonous patter.

The two friends had slept through the first part of the night, delightfully lulled

by the downpour, the dry snugness of the wickiup and by the warmth and glow of the fire; but some time after midnight an inquiring stream had pushed through the walls of their brushy tent and had grown rapidly. It spread out and, after turning and twisting, both sleepers had awakened to find a shallow moat around the inside of their habitation. Sitting side by side on the only dry spot remaining, they hugged their knees and waited with stubborn stoicism for daylight.

"I ain't worryin' so much about bein' out of grub as I am about bein' out of th' makin's," said Lanky with a good humor remarkable under the circumstances. He tossed another stick on the fire and watched

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the little streamer of sparks rush up to be blotted out by the rain. "There's elk an' deer enough to keep our stumicks filled; but I shore would like a smoke."

"I ain't worryin' near as much about grub or tobacco as I am about this cursed rain blottin' out every track," replied Mesquite, gently touching his wounded arm, gained in an argument with a cattle thief he had been forced to shoot. "Here we've gone an' got seven of them fellers, an' now th' others shore will get away. An' Shanghai fooled me every time, so far, an' now he'll get away."

Lanky's fingers were exploring pockets already well gone over, knowing them to be barren of tobacco, but persisting in the search as though some miracle might have slipped a sack in one of them. With a sigh he desisted and smiled understandingly at his companion.

"There shore won't be a track left," he admitted. "But let me tell you, kid, if it'll make you feel any better, that there ain't been nobody for years that has made that old fox Shanghai hump himself over th' landscape like you has. An' after th' bulldoggin' he's been through since you got on his trail, I'm willin' to bet that he's streakin' it out of this part of th' country as fast an' hard as he can fan his cayuse. You got him just about scared to death, with yore blood-bound trailin', an' he's shore headin' for some place that he figgers is safe. When he gets there he'll hole up tight as a scared prairie dog."

"That's just what's makin' me cuss," growled the youth. "I've got him so scared he won't give me a chance to get close to him, now that this rain is lettin' him get away. Why, I was nigh enough a couple of times to near put my sights on him; an' once I had him tied up like a bundle of hides!"

Lanky inched out of the edge of the rising mott, and chuckled:

"Huh! 'Tain't yore fault that he got away that time," he said. "You couldn't lick th' bunch that jumped on yore back. Shucks; I'm figgerin' you done right well to get as many of them thieves as you did. Me an' Red didn't get none, did we? Didn't you get 'em all?"

"Seven," growled Mesquite; "but seven ain't twelve." He reached toward his shirt pocket for the tobacco sack that was no longer there, and grunted. "What'll Hoppy say about me fallin' down like this?"

Lanky's laughter filled the wickiup, and for an instant he let his hand rest lightly on his companion's shoulder.

"He'll say yo're a shore enough wonder, kid, to do as well as you have. He never figgered you'd get 'em all."

"But I ain't took no prisoners, yet," muttered the youth, his hand straying to the deputy sheriff's badge on the under side of his vest; the badge he had so cordially hated, and which he did not regard any too favorably, even now.

Lanky hid his satisfaction at what that expressed regret told him and he tried to maintain a poker face. Hopalong was right! The germ of a regard for law and order was beginning to grow in this young man's consciousness. More than anything else that Lanky could report about this expedition, this news would please Hopalong. His own liking for the youngster went up a few degrees.

"Well, I don't hardly reckon you've had many chances to take any prisoners, kid," he replied. "They didn't give you no chance. An' if you had taken one, what would you 'a' done with him? If you managed to get him back to Twin River, you'd have to leave th' rest of th' gang, an' give 'em a chance to get clean away."

"Well; they've got away now," retorted Mesquite. "I'm goin' back to Broken Wheel to try to get trace of some of 'em; but if I don't find any sign, I won't know what to do next. That's th' worst of bein' a stranger to all this north country."

"I ain't no stranger to it," replied Lanky grinning. "We'll go to Broken Wheel, scout around an' lay in more supplies; an' then we'll head for th' country up around Big Moose. That used to be one of th' gang's hangouts. They've got a lot of friends up that way, an' sooner or later they're bound to drift up there. Wouldn't surprise me a heap if Red was ridin' that way right now."

Red Connors, their missing friend, had been given a part to play that had taken

him from them and put him to watching the passes leading northward from this mountain park. Neither had seen nor heard from him for several days and, consequently, had no knowledge of his present whereabouts; but Lanky, knowing his old friend pretty well, was about convinced that Red was on his way to the ranch, and to Big Moose. Lanky had no way of knowing that he was wrong.

"Um," said Mesquite. "Then we better make good time to Broken Wheel an' then lather our cayuses for Big Moose. Might 'a' been better if we'd not turned them other cayuses loose; we could use 'em for changin' mounts. Still, they would be a lot of trouble."

He thought for a moment, and continued.

"After we leave Broken Wheel, an' get about half way to Big Moose, we can circle south an' make a try at pickin' up th' trail of one of them fellers. This rain mebby ain't reached that far, or got there ahead of 'em. Give me a trail to foller an' I'm right at home."

"I'll bet my last shirt on that," said his companion with a chuckle. Lanky's admiration for his companion's trailing ability threatened to become boundless. "Kid, however did you learn so damn much about trailin'?"

Mesquite smiled and stretched one leg after the other.

"My father," he answered. "He was a great trailer. He should 'a' been, too, seein' that he was captured by th' Utes when he was a little kid, an' near growed up with 'em. He told me that th' Comanches were th' best Indian trailers in th' world, except, mebby, th' Apaches; but he said some of th' Utes was plenty good enough. Th' best trailers of all were some Mexicans that were captured when they were kids an' were brought up by th' Comanches or Apaches. My dad went on several raidin' parties as far south as th' Rio Grande, before he managed to escape."

Mesquite smiled gently.

"Th' old man thought a lot of me, an' put in most of his spare time playin' with me. We used to go trailin' around th' settlement together, me draggin' along behind him, an' when I got so I could foller one

set of tracks without losin' 'em, he used to laugh hisself half to death. He shore knew sign, an' he had an amazin' lot of patience."

"Then that's how you learned to make this here wickiup so smart an' quick, I reckon. What else did he show you? Learn you to talk th' sign language?" There was a little anxiety in Lanky's voice.

Mesquite shook his head.

"No; th' Utes didn't use it enough to know much about it," he answered. "They was a mountain tribe, an' didn't have much to do with th' prairie tribes. When they met 'em it meant a fight; except under th' walls of Bent's Fort; an' when they were there they wouldn't mix at all with th' Cheyennes or Arapahoes. When they went down on th' prairies after buffalo meat they were near scared to death of runnin' into one of th' prairie tribes; an' th' prairie tribes, when they went into th' mountains to get in one of th' parks, were near scared to death of th' Utes. Each knewed they were in th' enemies' country."

Lanky stifled a sigh of relief at his companion's confessed ignorance of the sign language, and leaned forward to look up at the sky. Dawn was at hand, and the rain seemed to be letting up. He yawned and stretched in the cramped quarters, and rubbed a leg that was half asleep.

"Y-e-e-a-a-h, u-m-m-m! Won't be long now before we can pull our stakes an' head over east," he said. "My stummick says we got to get us an elk or a deer before many hours go past."

"I'll get one," replied Mesquite. "This country is plumb full of their sign. Reckon it won't do no harm to shoot off a gun, now." He shifted slightly to ease his legs, and rubbed his smoke-smarting eyes. "Hope Red don't beat us to Big Moose by very long," he added. Had he known the facts he would have been content.

II.

RED CONNORS, wearied of watching a pass without results, had spent the rainy night under a ledge of rock. He was disgusted and discouraged, nearly out of food and tobacco, and his lively imagination had pictured his missing friends as being very

successful in their man hunt, while he had utterly failed in his part. This was no fault of his, but this fact gave him small solace.

Adding to his small fire and grudging himself enough food from his dwindling supply to make half a breakfast, he put some of his thoughts into words.

"Betcha them rustlin' coyotes never even heard of this here pass," he growled; "an' I betcha Lanky an' th' kid shore knowed it when they sent me up here to watch it. Here I am, near out of grub an' smokin', while they're chasin' around down south rollin' cigarettes, stuffin' themselves with bacon, beans an' biscuits, an' having some excitement. I ain't goin' to stand for it no longer! not no longer! I'm pullin' out of here as soon as I can saddle up, an' get back to Broken Wheel for some ham an' eggs, an' a couple of drinks. Watch th' passes, says th' kid! Watch hell, says I! I've watched all th' passes I'm goin' to watch. Far's I'm concerned all th' cattle thieves in th' world can use this pass for a bed ground. Damn that fire! Why didn't I get more wood when I was about it?"

An hour later Red was in the saddle scorning the lessening rain, and riding as straight as he could for Broken Wheel, his rifle resting across his saddle in case its owner's pious hope was justified. If he were lucky he might blunder on to one or more of the fugitive band, and in his present state of mind he hoped it would be more than one.

In this he was doomed to disappointment, for all that day and the next he pushed on without getting sight of any human being, or the fresh tracks made by one. Intermittent rains kept the ground soft and gave it no chance to dry out. At mid forenoon of the third day, as he topped a small rise, he leaned forward in the saddle and stared exultantly at the sign on the far slope: the fresh and muddy tracks of two horses.

Under favorable circumstances Red could read horse tracks as well as the majority of the plains riders of his day; but the circumstances were not favorable, for the tracks were not clean cut in the mushy earth. Hoping to come to some place, some

stretch of sand or earth hard enough to make some resistance to the horses' hoofs, he patted the rifle and pushed on along the fresh trail.

The distances between the prints of the hoofs on the same side of each animal was about three feet and he knew that the riders had gone on at a walk. This pleased him, but he was not pleased by the way they had persistently kept to slushy mud, and thus wittingly or unwittingly had hidden the tell-tale characteristics of the tracks. His displeasure over this, however, faded slowly as the significance of some of their erratic riding became plain, and he reached the conclusion that the riders had deliberately done this to hide their identity. If this were so, it must be that they feared pursuit, which indicated that they were members of the band which he and his friends had been trailing.

He grinned, pulled his hat tighter on his head, readjusted a fold of his slicker, and urged his mount into a trot.

"Go off an' leave me holdin' th' sack, will you?" he asked his absent friends, his voice exultant. "Stick me up in that pass, out of th' way, so you could hog th' game, huh? I'll show you somethin' purty soon!"

Gone was his sullen depression at this promise of action, and he hummed under his breath as he trotted along the trail, his eyes searching constantly and his gun balanced for quick use.

Pushing on until afternoon he rode along the side of a steep valley, emerged from it and swiftly checked his horse. A column of smoke was filtering above the trees of a distant woods, and straight toward it lay the tracks he had been following. Turning his horse, he rode back a few rods and then, angling down the slope, struck out on a roundabout course through heavy cover to approach the camp unseen.

Out in the open the morning wind and sun had dried the ground except in hollows and washes; but when Red entered the forest surrounding the sought-for camp fire he found everything wet. Riding as far as he dared, he at last reluctantly cached his horse by picketing it in a small opening in the brush which covered a fire-made clearing in the woods.

Half an hour later, under his breath cursing the coldness and the wetness of the ground, he dragged himself a few inches at a time up the far side of a little hill, straight for the climbing smoke column which marked his objective. He was a sight, for he was mud from his feet to his head. He even had managed to get mud on his back, and he was wet to the skin.

By the time he had reached his present position he was savage from mud, water and general misery; but his state of mind made him all the more determined to go through with his stalking. What a joke he would have on his two friends if he could capture or kill two of the cattle thieves within half a day's ride of the town!

Reaching the top of the hill he slipped off his sombrero and raised his head to peer into the woods. The odor of the fire was now strong, and he heard the intermittent sounds of horses moving as they grazed.

Shifting to the left he squirmed along the hill, working to get sight of the camp, his sombrero tucked under one arm. Between him and the camp was a thicket, a tangled and baffling mass of greenery; and within a few feet of this was a muddy streak on the hillside, where excess storm water escaped into the ravine below.

A little trickle was running down it now, and he shivered as he crawled into it; and then he froze as it broke into a murmur of protest at being dammed by his body. To him it seemed as though the sound could be heard for rods. After listening for a moment he went on again, with a silence, considering the mud and the thin brush, which reflected credit on his abilities.

The camp at last lay under his eyes and he studied it, warned of danger by its lack of occupants. Had they somehow learned of his proximity? Reason said that they had, for there lay the partly skinned and butchered carcass of a deer. Two saddles were piled on the far side of the clearing, but in such a position that they told him nothing about their owners.

He looked all around him, expecting a challenge or a bullet at any moment; but to go back was as dangerous as to go forward, and Red hated to retreat. Two to one, and with him doing the moving about,

they had the best of it; and he could not lie quietly in his exposed position with any more safety. Cover was what he needed, and cover was what he would try to get; once hidden he could let them do the moving.

He would try to wriggle to some bit of cover from where he could keep an eye on the horses, feeling that they would be a grave concern of the men he was after. As long as he could see the animals it would be like keeping a deer lick under his gun. Slipping down the hill a few feet, he moved on again to work around to a thicket on the other side of the camp, from where he was certain that he could see the horses.

While Red moved thus slowly and cautiously, another man, well back in the forest and on the other side of the ravine, was trotting in a half crouch, circling in an effort to discover any fresh trail leading toward the camp. This person found the muddy tracks of the lone stalker and, throwing his rifle forward, swiftly followed them.

Red at last gained a point below the coveted thicket and began to crawl up the slope toward it. Inch by inch he neared the top of the hill and finally peered over the rim.

A score of paces away a muddy boot protruded, and through the mass of leafless stems near the ground he could make out the general bulk of the wearer. His rifle slid forward, covering the unsuspecting man, and he was about to call out when caution stopped the words: if he made a sound or tried to capture this thief at such a distance he might be discovered and shot down by the thief's companion.

The thought made him glance quickly toward the camp, and his gaze rested on the two saddles, now broadside to him. They looked very familiar; they were very familiar, entirely too damned familiar after all the mud and muck he had crawled through.

Having nothing to fear, since they belonged to his friends, he gave a snort of disgust, and then slid quickly down the hill as a bullet touched his hair; and Red's hair was none too thick. For a snap shot from a swiftly reversed rifle Lanky had done very well, and the sudden thrashing

in the thicket which followed the crash of the gun indicated that the marksman was eager to get a second shot.

"You blame fool!" shouted Red, standing up and shaking a freckled fist at the top of the hill. "What th' hell you tryin' to do?"

Lanky's anxious face peered over the rim and its expression changed to outraged disgust.

"You callin' me a fool, after snortin' like that under th' feet of a man all keyed up to do some quick shootin'?" he yelled. "Of all th' stupid Siwashes yo're th' worst! There I was, all eyes an' ears, with my finger as tight on th' trigger as it dast be, an' you blunder up like a loco cow, an' snort! Don't you never do that agin, you—"

"Anybody 'd reckon, to hear you, that it was *yore* hair that bullet touched!" retorted Red, who firmly believed that he was the aggrieved party in the whole affair. "Lookit me, mud an' water from my feet to my hat! Fine mess *I* am, on account of you holin' up! What was you doin', huntin' Injuns?" he sarcastically demanded.

"Huntin' Injuns *yoreself!*" snapped Lanky. "You ain't no wetter than I am, me layin' in a pile of bushes that are worse'n sponges! You never did have no sense, *nohow!*" He glanced sidewise and leveled an accusing arm in the same direction. "Lookit what you done to th' Kid, makin' him waller in th' mud an' water. Lookit him!"

Red looked, and saw Mesquite standing up and grinning at the pair of them. Mesquite was a study in mud, and dirty water dripped from every sag in his clothes. He had followed swiftly on Red's trail and was lying with his rifle covering the rear of Lanky's thicket when Red's snort had started things.

"Yeah, I see him!" shouted Red, belligerently. "I see another damn fool like *yoreself!* You go an' pick out all th' muddy ground to travel over so you can blur *yore* tracks, build a fire that smokes to heaven, an' then blame *me* for trailin' you! What did you expect me to do? Come a skippin' an' a singin' through th' woods? That may be th' way you fools do *yore*

trailin', but it shore ain't *my* way. Another quarter of an inch lower down, an' that jackass up there would 'a' blowed my brains out!"

"I couldn't 'a' blowed any brains out of yore head if I'd held an *inch* lower—not with a double barrel shotgun, I couldn't, you flathead!" retorted Lanky. "Here's th' Kid an' me, reasonable dry after all th' rain, an' then you come along chasin' Injuns! Now look at us! Won't you never get no sense, at all?"

"Aw, go to hell!" snapped Red, and turned to glare at Mesquite. "What's th' fool reason for you fellers blurrin' yore trail like that? Why 'd you build a smoke-pot fire? You ketchin' loco from that tumblebug friend of oun?"

Mesquite choked back his laughter, wiped his eyes with a muddy sleeve, which did not add to his appearance, and slowly stood erect.

"Take things easy, you two!" he begged. "I got a pain in my side already. Red, yo're a picture! You must 'a' rooted like a hawg," and his laughter rang out again.

Seeing that Mesquite was unable to answer his question, Red turned to Lanky and repeated it, with trimmings.

"If you had any sense," retorted Lanky, "you'd know why we made that kind of a trail. Th' Kid reckoned mebby if we masked it, some blunderin' fool would foller it. He did foller it. We built that smoky fire because there wasn't no dry wood, which suited us, seein' the smoke was our bait. It was a bait, an' it worked: we caught a doodle bug, you red-headed fool! Any more questions you want to ask?"

Red slid and floundered as he climbed the hill, and stalked off to the camp in haughty dignity, muttering under his breath. Helping himself to a venison steak, he picked up a trimmed and peeled wand and turned toward the fire to broil his dinner. Lanky followed in grouchy silence, Mesquite trailing after the pair of them, wiping his eyes and feeling of his sides.

Grim tragedy had passed them by: If Red had fired from his position under the top of the hill he could have killed Lanky; and if he had straightened out of his crouch

his head would have pushed into Mesquite's vision and he could have been killed in turn. In silence the meat was cooked and eaten, and then, feeling better, but still a little tender, Lanky grinned experimentally and looked at Red.

"We got seven, all told; how many did you get, up there at th' pass?"

"Just as many as you figgered I'd get!" snapped Red. "How could I get any of 'em when you an' th' Kid was close herdin' 'em away from me all th' time?" He looked from one to the other. "What you been doin' since I saw you last?"

They told him in detail while the fire steamed the water out of their clothes, and in his interest in their words his belligerency slowly faded. By the time he had heard their stories he was somewhat restored to good humor; so much so that he sympathized with Mesquite for Shanghai's escape.

"Don't you chafe none, Kid," he said. "I got a purty good idea where we can pick up *his* trail. When a fox has a hole that ain't been found or hunted for, an' where he's allus been able to find safety, he ain't forgettin' it, or leavin' it, no matter how much he's been chased when he was away from it. An' he's been chased so hard an' far an' close that once he gets back to his hang-out he'll stick close to it till things quiet down. I wish I could have seen him when he was ridin' between you an' Lanky, like a blame fool; an' when he smelled out that somethin' was terrible wrong."

Red leaned back and laughed as he pictured the old fox's indignation.

"We got to go to Broken Wheel to get supplies, an' clean up this end of th' country," said Mesquite. "As long as we're here there ain't no use lettin' things slide, an' mebby overlookin' a couple of them fellers. *Then*," he leaned forward eagerly, "we'll hunt th' old fox on his home ridges!"

"Let's see: there's Foxy Joe, Hub Hendricks, Buck Eades, an' Tom Short left out of that gang," said Lanky. "Five out of twelve. Hum-m! Buck an' Hub allus was purty thick, an' they'll likely team up; likewise Foxy Joe an' Tom Short will likely team up. Th' last two are Big Moose bums, an' we'll mebby get sight of them up that

way. Yes, Kid; we'll shore assay Broken Wheel, *after dark*, quietlike. That bein' so we've got plenty of time to get there. 'Tain't more'n four hours away, right now."

He glanced at the fire and swore.

"Cussed near out, with us settin' right ag'in' it! We'll build it up, dry out, an' take things easy till time to start. Wish to Heaven I had a smoke!"

Mesquite having scraped off the more superabundant mud from his clothes, dropped the stick and gazed reflectively at the carcass of the deer.

"I was thinkin' we might better jerk what's left of that meat," he said thoughtfully, his mind running into the future. "We shore got plenty of smoke for it."

Red and Lanky exchanged sly grins, and the former spoke.

"But what's th' use, Kid?" he asked. "We'll be in town to-night, an' we can get all th' grub we want."

"I ain't shore we better show ourselves so soon," replied Mesquite. "If any of them coyotes have headed for Broken Wheel, they'll be watchin' th' hills close an' ready to streak out at th' first sign of us."

"But we'll ride in *after dark*," said Lanky, a little worried by this threatened postponement of a smoke. "We'll scout up to all th' winders an' see who's in town before we show ourselves."

"An' if them fellers have got any sense they'll be layin' low where we can't see 'em, mebby outside th' town in some shack; an' they'll have friends on th' lookout to pass 'em th' word. Everybody in town knows us by sight."

Lanky groaned.

"There's somethin' in that," remarked Red, "as th' feller said when he found bugs in th' bed. They shore know us, an' we don't know who their friends are. Just what's in yore mind, Kid?"

Lanky cut in impolitely:

"I don't know what's in *his* mind, or *yourn*, neither," he said, glaring from one to the other; "but I shore know what's in *my* mind, an' it's done took root deeper'n any mesquite tree you ever saw. I'm goin' to get me th' makin's of some cigarettes, an' I'm goin' to get 'em before sunup to-morrow. *That's* what's in *my* mind!"

"I ain't surprised a hull lot," retorted Red, "except that yore mind could have all of that in it at once. You ain't strained it, have you?"

"An' no damn smart Aleck remarks from a flathead can change me a mite!" rejoined Lanky. "You heard me palaver, an' I'm shore set."

"So's a mule!" retorted Red. "For a measly cigarette you'd spoil th' only chance we've got of pickin' up a murderin' cow thief or two before we get out of this part of th' country. If yore boots was bigger you'd mebby have more room for brains!"

"That so?" demanded Lanky. "What business you got to stick yore iron in this here fire? How many of them ambushin' skunks did you get?"

"I shore miscalled it when I said boots!" flared Red, flushing. "You an' th' Kid know why I didn't get none of 'em! Next time I'll see that you don't shove me off in a corner to play mumbly peg, an' that's flat! How many did you get?"

In the wrangling that ensued the main topic, and the most important one, was forgotten: Lanky's threat to get a sack of tobacco before the dawn of another day. Red, mumbling to himself at Lanky's stupidity in questioning the usefulness of his efforts in the pass, stalked off with Mesquite's saddle on his shoulder, to borrow Mesquite's horse. He soon rode back past the fire, where Mesquite was slicing thin bits of venison preparatory to jerking them in the smoke; and when he returned on his own horse and joined the pair, the argument was not brought up again.

III.

THREE men rode in single file on their way to Broken Wheel, climbing ridges or winding about between them, alert for fresh tracks or other signs of any of the outlaws they wanted. Twilight found them passing through the last deep, wide cañon between them and their destination, and about two hours later they pulled up on the rim of the saucer-shaped valley and looked down at the yellow lights of the town.

The night was clear and star-bright, a gentle wind whispering through the brush

and sage on the hillside and the bunchgrass in the open.

The middle rider glanced to the right and the left, speaking to his companions.

"I reckon we better ride well around th' town, an' not stop till we get on th' other side, where they won't be so likely to expect us. We'll give 'em a couple of days to feel safe, an' then come in after dark an' clean up our job in this part of th' country."

"Who do you figger will be down there?" asked Red, looking steadily at the faint lights below. He was holding himself in check and agreeing to this waiting policy, while he fairly ached to go down and put matters to the test.

Lanky chuckled, keeping in his mind his determination to get his smoking tobacco, but carefully refraining from giving his companions any inkling of his thoughts.

"Don't know who," he answered before Mesquite could reply, "except that Shanghai won't be there. Most likely, if any of 'em are in town, it'll be Buck Eades or Hub Hendricks. However," he said, chuckling softly, "it don't make no difference to us who he is, just so he's there. Where are you fellers aimin' to head for now?"

Mesquite shook his head, not being familiar enough with this part of the country to name a place; but Red was not at a loss.

"Right in that little blind cañon where me an' you laid low th' day after we got here," he said. "There's some dry fire-wood under a ledge that I rustled while you was loafin' around lookin' at that split top mountain. Its off th' trails an' ain't likely to be visited."

Lanky and Mesquite grunted their assent and the three pushed on along the hill, a score of paces below the rim. The short line strung out, Lanky bringing up the rear, the position he had fallen into naturally as they had swung their horses to ride off in the new direction.

Red's low voice asked a question and Mesquite, who was second in the line, pushed ahead to join the leader and find out what he was talking about; they were now directly opposite the town and neither, being wrapped up in their conversation, noticed that the tail had come off the end of their kite and had deserted. They rode on

for another half mile when a vague feeling of distrust took Red's mind from the conversation and made him check his horse.

"What's th' matter?" asked Mesquite in a low voice, his hand resting on a gun butt.

"What's happened to Lanky?" asked Red suspiciously.

Mesquite choked back a curse and listened. The sighing of the dying wind and the insect noises were all that could be heard. There came no sound of hoof-falls, no squeaking or creaking of leather, no tinkle or jingle of metal.

Red's words coruscated as he whirled his horse and pushed down the long, gentle slope toward town. Mesquite's muttered profanity trailed behind him in the blushing air as he raced to overtake his red-haired friend.

To them both at the same instant had come the explanation of that guilty silence in the rear: Lanky, like a stubborn mosey-head, must have his own way. He was making good his threat and his promise, and would have a sack of tobacco before dawn whether they liked it or not.

In their innocence they had named a definite point, the blind cañon; and, knowing where he could find them was all that Lanky had needed to let him stop and watch them ride away from him into the night.

Lanky dismounted just outside the town and picketed his horse behind a small ridge covered with sagebrush, where it would be effectually hidden from spying eyes. Making his way slowly toward the thickest of the lights, he kept alert watch on all sides of him, and when he had gained the end of the main street he chose the rear of the building on the east side of it, and slipped from one to the next, examining each in turn through windows or cracks.

The faint sounds of his cautious movements were drowned by the noises within, where conversation hummed or laughter roared. The first three buildings were saloons, and each had its group of smoking and drinking men. Next came a general store, where a single kerosene lamp smoked lazily and threw a dim radiance on the ends of boxes and barrels, and picked out of the encircling gloom the high lights of tinware

and the curved shoulders of bottles of various liquids.

At this window Lanky paused, his gaze resting on a small and dirty showcase, in which tobacco in paper and cloth was stacked in neat little piles. There were blue and red and yellow papers of it; and a pile of cloth sacks, each with its small, round, paper tag, made him wet his lips. In his nostrils lay the scent of tobacco smoke from three saloons.

He scouted around a bit and then returned to the window. No one seemed to be abroad in the streets, and he chuckled as he pictured his two friends' vexation when they missed him. He did not know that they were racing down the slope toward town, careless of holes or dry washes.

How was he to get one of those precious sacks without revealing his identity to the proprietor and, perhaps, spreading the news and the warning that one of the Double-Y riders had returned to town? A solution presented itself, and a grin slid across his face.

In a moment, masked heavily by his neck-kerchief, he slipped around to the door—and found it closed and locked. While he swore in his throat there came a shout of laughter from the dance hall down the street, and Lanky grinned again.

What satisfaction would there be in walking in and holding up a lone, harmless store-keeper for tobacco he could pay for? He was glad the store was closed. Going around the rear of the building he hitched up his belt, and paused as his ears caught the sounds of faint and distant hoof beats somewhere in the darkness west of the town. He knew what those sounds meant—a guilty conscience told him that—and he knew that he would have to work fast.

In the dance hall a raconteur of prairie and range tales was holding forth to the pleasure of himself and his laughing audience.

"There he was, head down in th' mud, an' his feet kickin' like a frog's, an' his cayuse buck-jumpin' across th' prairie, leavin' him twenty miles to hoof it. I loosed my rope an' dropped th' noose over—"

"Stick 'em up, everybody!" came a snapped order from the rear door, and the

"I ain't surprised a hull lot," retorted Red, "except that yore mind could have all of that in it at once. You ain't strained it, have you?"

"An' no damin smart Aleck remarks from a flathead can change me a mitel!" rejoined Lanky. "You heard me palaver, an' I'm shore set."

"So's a mule!" retorted Red. "For a measly cigarette you'd spoil th' only chance we've got of pickin' up a murderin' cow thief or two before we get out of this part of th' country. If yore boots was bigger you'd mebby have more room for brains!"

"That so?" demanded Lanky. "What business you got to stick yore iron in this here fire? How many of them ambushin' skunks did you get?"

"I shore miscalled it when I said boots!" flared Red, flushing. "You an' th' Kid know why I didn't get none of 'em! Next time I'll see that you don't shove me off in a corner to play mumbly peg, an' that's flat! How many did you get?"

In the wrangling that ensued the main topic, and the most important one, was forgotten: Lanky's threat to get a sack of tobacco before the dawn of another day. Red, mumbling to himself at Lanky's stupidity in questioning the usefulness of his efforts in the pass, stalked off with Mesquite's saddle on his shoulder, to borrow Mesquite's horse. He soon rode back past the fire, where Mesquite was slicing thin bits of venison preparatory to jerking them in the smoke; and when he returned on his own horse and joined the pair, the argument was not brought up again.

III.

THREE men rode in single file on their way to Broken Wheel, climbing ridges or winding about between them, alert for fresh tracks or other signs of any of the outlaws they wanted. Twilight found them passing through the last deep, wide cañon between them and their destination, and about two hours later they pulled up on the rim of the saucer-shaped valley and looked down at the yellow lights of the town.

The night was clear and star-bright, a gentle wind whispering through the brush

and sage on the hillside and the bunchgrass in the open.

The middle rider glanced to the right and the left, speaking to his companions.

"I reckon we better ride well around th' town, an' not stop till we get on th' other side, where they won't be so likely to expect us. We'll give 'em a couple of days to feel safe, an' then come in after dark an' clean up our job in this part of th' country."

"Who do you figger will be down there?" asked Red, looking steadily at the faint lights below. He was holding himself in check and agreeing to this waiting policy, while he fairly ached to go down and put matters to the test.

Lanky chuckled, keeping in his mind his determination to get his smoking tobacco, but carefully refraining from giving his companions any inkling of his thoughts.

"Don't know who," he answered before Mesquite could reply, "except that Shanghai won't be there. Most likely, if any of 'em are in town, it'll be Buck Eades or Hub Hendricks. However," he said, chuckling softly, "it don't make no difference to us who he is, just so he's there. Where are you fellers aimin' to head for now?"

Mesquite shook his head, not being familiar enough with this part of the country to name a place; but Red was not at a loss.

"Right in that little blind cañon where me an' you laid low th' day after we got here," he said. "There's some dry fire-wood under a ledge that I rustled while you was loafin' around lookin' at that split top mountain. Its off th' trails an' ain't likely to be visited."

Lanky and Mesquite grunted their assent and the three pushed on along the hill, a score of paces below the rim. The short line strung out, Lanky bringing up the rear, the position he had fallen into naturally as they had swung their horses to ride off in the new direction.

Red's low voice asked a question and Mesquite, who was second in the line, pushed ahead to join the leader and find out what he was talking about; they were now directly opposite the town and neither, being wrapped up in their conversation, noticed that the tail had come off the end of their kite and had deserted. They rode on

for another half mile when a vague feeling of distrust took Red's mind from the conversation and made him check his horse.

"What's th' matter?" asked Mesquite in a low voice, his hand resting on a gun butt.

"What's happened to Lanky?" asked Red suspiciously.

Mesquite choked back a curse and listened. The sighing of the dying wind and the insect noises were all that could be heard. There came no sound of hoof-falls, no squeaking or creaking of leather, no tinkle or jingle of metal.

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"Stick 'em up, everybody!" came a snapped order from the rear door, and the

Instant obedience of the crowd was ludicrous.

The speaker's hands went ceilingward as his words stopped and his jaw sagged. Up in the front of the room two men had been sitting close to an open door, where they could get out of sight in a jump; and they moved in a blur of frantic speed as the interruption came, and by the movement called attention to themselves.

In the rear door stood a small, lean man peering over the doubled edge of a bandanna handkerchief, in his hand a large and shiny Colt. It swung slowly on a half circle, jabbed at the movement in the front of the room, and swung back again part way until its muzzle covered the man behind the bar. The newcomer tossed a coin across the room with his free hand, and in a deep and guttural voice made known his wants.

"Couple sacks of smokin' tobacco *damn quick!*" he growled. "Don't nobody move!"

In a little front room two men lowered their guns and chuckled.

"Some gent pacin' a sheriff, an' plumb out of th' makin's," said the first, breathing a sigh of relief.

"He shore gave me a start, th' damn fool!" growled the second, truculently, as he regretfully lowered his weapon.

Then he laughed at the utterly ridiculous situation. A roomful of tough men, held up by a masked man who wanted smoking tobacco, and was paying for it! It might be that he wished to make no more enemies than necessary. Through the big room, as the truth of the situation percolated through various heads, there came a ripple of laughter, and hands showed a tendency to drop.

"Keep 'em up!" snapped the man in the door, trying to keep his sudden exultation out of his voice. "Chuck me that tobacco, an' damn quick. I ain't got no time to lose!"

Two sacks sailed through the air, one after another, and were quickly picked up by the intruder. He snarled a warning against pursuit, backed slowly from the door, slipped aside and was gone, leaving roars of reverberating laughter behind him.

"An' did you see Hub an' Buck bust all

records for th' standin' broad jump?" shouted a liquor mellowed individual through the general noise, rising to point toward the door of the little room. "Come on out, fellers; he's gone!"

"Looked like you was expectin' company, Buck!" yelled an acquaintance near the bar. "Sorta looks like th' drinks are on you fellers!"

Buck Eades and Hub Hendricks shuffled shamefacedly back into the big room, their guns dangling at their knees. To hide their embarrassment both of them wore stern expressions.

"Buy th' drinks for this gang of blotters?" asked Hub with a sneer. "Who th' hell was yore Santy Claus last time?"

"Anybody that don't like our jumpin' shore can make a fight outa it," said Buck, enraged by the show he had made of himself and by the laughter roaring in his ears. Reassuring words from half a dozen mouths somewhat placated him, and he slowly slipped the Colt back into its holster.

"Huh!" sneered Hub, still holding to his weapon. "If we looked funny jumpin' for cover, you shore can figger what this gang out here looked like, stickin' up their hands like jumpin' jacks for a single man!" He glanced around nervously, still humming to the danger note. Lurching awkwardly, he bumped against his companion.

"Come on; let's get outa this!" he whispered. "That feller was in a big hurry, an' a posse may be right close!"

Buck nodded and waved his hand to the laughing crowd.

"I'll go see if I can find that modest gent; if I do, I'll take a sack of smokin' off him, just to show up you fellers."

A quick change in the expression on the faces of the crowd made him whirl about, to see Lanky Smith, minus the masking neck-kerchief, filling the front door remarkably well for a man of his slight stature.

"You come here, Hub an' Buck!" he ordered, his gun poised.

He was in an agony of fear that his two friends would arrive before he had made the captures single-handed; and when he finished speaking he heard the pounding of swiftly running feet drawing close to the building, and a voice that he knew well.

Hub sprang to one side, his hand streaking up, and went down in a crumpled heap as Lanky's gun roared. And with the roar of the gun a bottle flashed through the air from the side of the room and struck the Double-Y puncher on the shoulder, throwing him off his balance.

At this instant Buck, snarling with rage and hatred, jerked out his own gun, fired at the deputy so hastily that he missed, and leaped toward the nearest window. He went through it, taking sash and glass with him, and landed in the arms of a man who joined battle with him joyously.

At the rear appeared a red-haired fellow with a Winchester in his hands, and his booming voice rang with sincerity. Again hands went up and remained there while anxious eyes watched the finish of this swift tragedy.

At Red's snapped command to the crowd Lanky, his balance recovered, leaped toward that same ruined window and through it, to land beside a struggling, writhing pair on the ground. As he bent over to peer through the darkness to establish identities a face for an instant turned toward the faint light of the window, and Lanky's arm rose and fell, the impact of the gun butt sounding sweet in his ears.

Mesquite untangled himself and stood up, grinning through the grime and blood on his face. He leaped to the window and slanted two guns through it to help the watchful and grim Red keep the crowd under control.

"Yo're a fool for luck, you grinnin' fat-head!" flung Mesquite over his shoulder. "An' at last I've taken a prisoner, taken a man alive!"

"Hell you did!" snapped Langy pugnaciously. "Who chased him into yore arms, an' stunned him?"

There came a joyous shout from the rear door as Red saw Lanky push up beside Mesquite in the window.

"I knowed you'd do it!" yelled Red, grinning from ear to ear. "I knowed you'd get 'em!"

"Yo're a liar!" snapped Lanky as he slid through the window to take a close look at the man he had shot. "You didn't know nothin' of the kind!"

"No more than you did, you lucky fool!" retorted Red, swiftly and easily shifting from false congratulation to earnest abuse. "Get yore makin's?" he asked with a sneer.

"Yes, I got my makin's!" retorted Lanky triumphantly. "An' what th' hell did you get?"

THE END OF No. 9

NEXT WEEK: "THE GIFT OF THE DARK."



THE DIVORCÉE

A ROSEBUD

Was her youth,
And the shriveling, settling petals
Were pools of drying blood.
You see,
Her heart was broken,
But then,
It didn't matter,
There was nothing
Left to spill.
For roses live
Perhaps a day
And when their petals fall,
They die.

Sonia Ruthie Monk.



Background

By **GORDON STILES**

WHEN Roger Bassett entered Sheffield Scientific School, he was a tall, rather gangling youth just verging on his eighteenth birthday. To his fellow students he appeared as a somewhat reserved chap, a little too serious, perhaps, to whose forehead frown-lines leaped readily.

It was known that he hailed from New York and that he roomed with Tom Ellis who was taking the academic course at New Haven. That was about all.

Only Tom Ellis, who had lived on the same street as Roger and who had been his playmate and chum all his life, knew that the dominant influence in the formation of Roger Bassett's character had been the intense mutual hatred which had existed between Roger's father and mother. The son never knew what had been the origin of this hatred and his parents had died within ten months of each other during his last year at prep. So he never would know.

What did stand out in his mind was the recollection that, in the beginning, the animosity appeared to be on his mother's side only. Always from the earliest days he could remember, she had had a grievance. It may have taken different forms, but it was always there. As a child of seven or eight years, he had been forced to the conclusion that his father must be a very bad man; otherwise there would not be occasion for perpetual criticism on the part of his mother.

He had felt this keenly because at first his father had seemed to him a delightful person—a genial, kindly soul. Wonderful, too. Wonderful and big and strong.

Why, his father could do anything in the world he chose to do! Roger used to wonder why, at table or in the evenings, his mother found so much that was unpleasant to say to his father. Things that caused his father to grow silent and grave and to wear a worried look when he finally left the table or the room,

As he remembered, his father never had said much on these occasions—that is, at first. What he had said had been spoken quietly, placatingly, it seemed. Sometimes there was an effort at jollity or banter. But this apparently had not the effect intended because it usually made his mother more angry than ever.

As the years wore on he had seen lines come upon his father's brow. These were slight at first, hardly noticeable. But they grew deeper and deeper. And there came a day when the patient look had vanished, when the worry gave way to annoyance, when the placid, soothing tones became sharp and irritable. Days when the boy found himself constantly caught in a cross fire of black looks, of hostile glarings which gave emphasis to the bitter words that assailed his young ears.

He had listened to all this with a terrific sense of helplessness, his whole being knotted in bitter but unexpressed protest. Little things magnified, mild differences growing into acrimonious clashes, culminating in barbed insults.

In his own way he came to the conclusion that his mother was at fault, that it was her ill temper and perpetual nagging which had so worked upon his father as to sour him, to embitter him. Until at last the man's love for his wife had been stifled, worn to the breaking point. Its place had been taken by a slow-growing hatred.

In the end there had been no effort to conceal their bickerings even before Tom Ellis who came frequently to the house. Tom understood the situation pretty well and, while between him and Roger no word ever passed, Roger could feel Tom's sympathetic understanding and was grateful for it.

Roger did not experience the sadness he knew he ought to feel when his mother died. He wondered if he was an unnatural son, if the sense of relief which he had sensed at her passing indicated depravity or a flaw in his emotional make-up. He tried to be sorry only to discover that he *could not* feel sorry.

Yet he was grief-stricken when his father died of pneumonia, only ten months later. Somehow, he felt that his father had been

cheated out of something—that he should have had years of peace and tranquillity after the nightmare which had been his married life and the boyhood of his son.

II.

SUCH then, was the background against which Roger Bassett played his part in life. And, rightly or wrongly, bitterness toward womankind came to be his leading characteristic. Leading, because other outstanding qualities, those which his fellow men were most likely to remark, largely grew out of his attitude toward women.

As, for instance, his remarkable devotion to his studies. Time which, in other circumstances, might have been spent in fussing and playing about in sundry drawing rooms, went into intense application to the mastery of those elements which go to the making of a construction engineer, the calling he had chosen.

Not that he withdrew from the world with his text books. Indeed, he was at all times an enthusiastic participant in such activities as did not entail the presence of, or coöperation with, girls. In the company of the latter he felt an automatic hardening, a soul-searing revulsion that he could not analyze or explain.

There were occasions when he was thrown into unavoidable contact with the opposite sex—perhaps during a more or less wild evening with his crowd at one of the beaches or at a roadhouse. Then, if Roger was quite sober, he would find an opportunity of ducking the party. If he chanced to be a little drunk, he would trail, glumly; frankly contemptuous of the women or abominably rude to them.

The friendship of Tom Ellis meant more to him than anything else unless it was his studies. The two were virtually inseparable. And when, because of the slenderness of his funds, Roger elected to work during the holidays, Tom gamely got himself a job, too, passing up the lure of the resorts which claimed most of their fellow students.

The four years at New Haven passed swiftly and their close of necessity marked the end of the close association with Tom. Roger's high standing in his class won for

him an immediate offer from the engineering firm of Capewell & Hodges, internationally famous as builders of power plants. As for Tom, he was automatically absorbed into his father's bond house.

At first they saw each other frequently, but presently Roger was sent out into the Middle West to glean his first experience in actual construction work. For eight months he did the drudgery which always falls to the junior engineer on a big job, then returned to New York for a new assignment.

The pleasure he had expected to find in this visit was wantonly dissipated by the discovery that Tom Ellis was hard and fast in the toils of one Margery Despard and that he was no longer the same old Tom. Margery tinged his conversation and took most of his time, to the unbounded resentment of Roger Bassett.

Only once did the latter consent to meet the charmer and that after a terrific battle on the part of Tom, who was perfectly certain that Roger's aversion—or mania, he called it—would vanish utterly at the wonderful touch of this girl of girls. He assured Roger that Margery was like no other woman in the world and that she, as well as himself, would be desolated if Roger would not join them at least for luncheon. In the end Roger did.

He came away with a feeling that the world was empty. Tom was as lost to him as if the ground had opened and swallowed him. So far as Roger could see, Margery Despard was quite the same or off the same piece as her millions of sisters scattered about the planet. No better, no worse.

He squirmed at her assumption of proprietorship over Tom. Tom was going to marry her, too, in six months! Well, thank God, he would be away off in Nevada and would not be forced to witness the sacrifice! He supposed it had to be but he was filled with aching regret as he thought of the old days which now would be farther than ever behind. He felt that a chapter in his life was closed.

III.

At the end of his second year with Capewell & Hodges, Roger had made such prog-

ress that he was rated as a full-fledged construction engineer, capable of taking entire charge of a job. Which is some years sooner than most of the clan make the grade. That was one of the two important events that marked the period.

The other was the crash of Tom Ellis's matrimonial structure. It had lasted less than a year and in a somewhat bitter letter, Tom had admitted that Roger was right in his contentions, had told how he and Margery had disagreed about almost everything from the very outset. Now Tom was on an extended visit to Europe and Margery was with her family at Bar Harbor. There was no hope of reconciliation, Tom declared. Roger set his lips grimly as he read and to his general dislike of everything feminine was added a specific and violent hatred of Margery Ellis for what she had done to Tom.

His detestation of the species became so bitter that he began to wonder if, after all, it was not a mania, as Tom had suggested. He hated the occasional contacts with female secretaries and cashiers which his business involved, insisted upon a male stenographer for himself.

An illustration of this intolerance developed in an incident which occurred during the progress of the first contract he handled on his own. It was a large steam plant for the Metcalfe-Bailey Knitting Company, located at Wellston in the West Virginia mountains.

Roger was elated by the opportunity to show what he could do and determined to complete the work in record time as well as show his employers a finished piece of engineering. He had the faculty of getting work out of men; he was known to be a driver and uncompromising in many respects. But he was counted fair—willing to see the other side of any question pertaining to the job in hand.

He was standing, one afternoon, on a high staging, directing the placing of concrete forms for the walls of the spacious coal bunkers. Down in the excavation below his foreman was superintending the activities of perhaps fifty laborers, a motley, cement-stained crowd answering to terrific and unpronounceable names. Everybody

was busy and Roger was at peace with the world.

Four girls, sauntering along the street on the opposite side of the excavation from Roger, paused, then ventured down the cleared haulway, staring curiously at the concrete mixer, the stationary engine and the scurrying workmen. In age, all of the visitors appeared to be hovering about eighteen and they were as glowing as the brilliant September afternoon. Their gay frocks made a vivid splotch of color against the somber background of sand and rock and shanties covered with tarred paper. Their rippling laughter and animated talk mingled with the bedlam of the job.

Roger did not hear this, but following the interested glance of one of his men, noted that work on the Metcalfe-Bailey power plant was practically at a standstill. Every last wheelbarrow and spade and pick was for the moment idle while its accustomed manipulator treated himself to an eyeful of sparkling femininity. The straw bosses, too, had forgotten to maintain their wonted dignity.

Roger snorted in disgust and called to his foreman on the ground just below the staging: "Joe, chase those people off the job."

Joe glanced quickly at the intruders, scratched his head and replied: "Don't see how I can, Mr. Bassett. One of 'em's Miss Metcalfe."

"I don't care a damn who they are! Chase 'em off!"

Then, as the foreman still hesitated, he said: "Never mind. I will."

He strode to the edge of the platform and shouted: "Hey, you! Get out of here!"

The girls looked up, then at each other. Their movements indicated surprise and there was some conversation among them. But they made no move to depart.

The outraged Roger waited a few seconds, glaring vexedly at the distant quartet. Cupping his hands, he bellowed coarsely: "I mean you! Get to hell out of here!"

The girls tarried no longer. Four heads were flung jauntily upward and four pairs of shoulders registered supreme contempt as the visitors wheeled and marched quickly away.

The episode, circulated by word of mouth among the elements which follow construction work the world over, was the prime factor in establishing Roger Bassett's reputation as "a damn good boss, but hell on the skirts!" And it must be said that in subsequent instances, he fully lived up to said reputation.

For many reasons this was not unpleasing to the firm, especially as Roger handled one big contract after another with unfailing skill and to the credit of the company. In four years he was not once a single day over the stipulated time limit and in most cases he managed to cut the schedule materially. Construction engineers know what that means. And Roger Bassett's name came to be associated with dependability wherever piles were driven and stacks were reared.

IV.

ROGER'S first real vacation came just after the sixth anniversary of his connection with Capewell & Hodges and was the fruit of determined urging on the part of Mr. Capewell, who, at the same time, gave utterance to certain remarks which, Roger felt, pointed to a partnership in the near future.

"I'm going to ship you up to Pinecliff, my place in the Adirondacks," Capewell told him, "and I don't want to hear a peep out of you for at least two months. You think you're a hard guy who never needs a rest. And there's no such thing. You needn't look so alarmed. There isn't a woman on the reservation. Jap servants; and the camp is open house to certain of my friends who have standing invitations.

"You know Battersby. He'll be there, and Tod Jessup, who was on that Mexican job with you, is likely to float in any minute. Oh, you'll have plenty of good company. The cellar is somewhat more than damp and the Rockledge Club is only six miles away. You've heard of it—run by the Rockledge Inn people. Fine golf course and eight bang-up tennis courts. They tell me you sling a mean racket, too."

Roger regarded the invitation as something of a royal command, but when he arrived at Pinecliff, some hours north of Utica, and flopped comfortably into the

astonishment at the spectacle of Roger Bassett and Anne Parsons playing singles together. The gasp which followed this discovery quickly took verbal form and the volume of chatter increased to a roar when, three days later, the two were seen motoring along the mountain roads in a shiny new roadster which Roger had hastily acquired. The head wagging and murmured "At lasts" multiplied.

The bunch at Pinecliff was cautious at first about spoofing their companion. It was a question as to how he would receive gibes on the subject. But when Tod Jessup ventured, "Gee, Roger, I'm glad to see you go human at last," Roger only grinned sheepishly and they knew it was all right.

They would have been convinced, indeed, that matters were all right if they could have seen Roger and Anne together on a certain brilliant afternoon some four weeks after their first meeting—if they could have witnessed a picnic lunch which the two were sharing on a sun-washed ledge overlooking a bright lake, miles away from everything.

If they could have done so they would have beheld Roger, his heart in his eyes, following eagerly every movement of the girl as she busied herself with the arrangement of the repast on the gleaming white cloth. And on her glowing face they could have seen written adoration—a longing adoration which any one of a score of men would have given the world to see, had he been its object. They would have marveled at Roger's restraint when it was so flagrantly obvious that he need only speak a word to win Anne Parsons.

But Roger, unversed in the complex game of love, was not so sure. He had been overwhelmed by something bigger than himself, something which defied the analysis he had tried to apply. And he had yielded because it was so glorious.

He didn't care what the consequences might be; he did not even consider that there might be consequences. He wanted Anne as he had not dreamed it would be possible to want anybody or anything in the world. He must be perfectly certain that she wanted him before he risked a showdown—that was the way he reasoned it. Only the aching love, the love which was to

him as food to a man long starved, made it so very hard to wait.

But, with Anne so completely worshipful that the whole world could read it in her face, it was inevitable that Roger should come soon to realize that the ground under his feet was firm indeed. When he did realize that, he was quick to act. What was in his heart had been pent up too long. Also the opportunity was at hand.

VII.

At the end of the rose garden of the Rockledge Club stood a roomy summer house, vine-clad and sequestered. From the rear of this structure one could look down into the green depths of a steep-walled ravine and across to the purple summits of the gaunt mountains stretching away into the north. The furniture was of wicker and consisted of a few chairs, a wide settee and a center table.

To this spot Roger and Anne had come on an afternoon when the entire membership of the club was following the work of a professional around the links. Both the man and the girl seemed to feel that something was imminent. They had passed up golf with a sort of tacit understanding, without discussing the matter and had strolled off into the garden, gravitating naturally toward the summer house. There was an electric quality in the atmosphere which both felt and they walked in silence.

Anne stood for a minute or two, gazing out through the frame of rambling vines to the distant hills; Roger, at her shoulder, looked at Anne. He knew that his hour had come. Her silence was eloquent and he felt her waiting for him to speak.

His heart was a turmoil; all that he felt—had felt for weeks—was struggling for expression. He was shaken by the fierce waves of emotion than ran through him. He looked at the pink curve of her cheeks, at her slim, round arms, at the soft line of her throat, with nothing short of reverence. He wanted to tell her what he knew he must tell her, but there were no words which could express the love that was in his heart.

Presently Anne sighed, slowly turned and sank into a deep chair.

"It's lovely here," she breathed, looked up at Roger with eyes softly bright, "isn't it, Roger?"

He had been gazing at her with a steadiness which, in itself, spoke words, but now he said: "Anne—Anne! I—I—oh, you *must* know what I want to tell you."

"What is it?" she whispered without looking at him.

"It's—it's—that I love you, Anne! I can't find any words to tell you how I love you—how I have loved and worshiped you for—for—oh, ever since you came to me in the garden. You just walked in and swept everything else away except—just that—I love you, Anne, and I want you to marry me—you *must* marry me, Anne!"

He leaned over, took her hand in his and held it gently. Anne sat as if pondering what he had said and when she spoke she did not raise her eyes. Her voice was very low, but there was in it evidence that she was controlling it with difficulty.

She said: "I'm glad you told me this, Roger. I've waited for you to say what you have said. I've wanted you to say it from the moment I met you there, on the club veranda. I have hoped—oh, that day, I deliberately made up my mind that you *should* love me!"

She paused a second, went on, picking her words carefully, repeating them slowly: "You know, Roger, I hardly needed an introduction to you then. I'd met you before." Here her speech quickened, so that he had not time to put the question that was in his eyes into words. "It was four years ago when I was visiting Jeanne Metcalfe, in Wellston. I went to call on you one afternoon and—"

She snatched away her hand, rose swiftly to her feet. Very straight she stood, her face flushed and her violet eyes blazing. "And now—and now—you *get to hell out of here!*"

Gone black inside, Roger stood there, mute. His ears could not believe what his staring eyes had seen, those lovely lips forming those coarse, horrible words—the words he had once used to her!

There was hate in the blazing eyes that held his so steadily. Slowly, a dull red wave crept over his face. It showed through

the tan, spread itself to the roots of his hair. For a moment he remained motionless, then said in a flat voice, "I congratulate you," turned and walked swiftly away!

The girl stood like a statue, watching him until he disappeared around the bend in the path between the rose trees.

"God have mercy!" she moaned. "I love him! Oh, I love him!"

VIII

WHEN Roger marched into Pinecliff, packed his kit and departed, no questions were asked by those who saw him go. They had seen his face as he entered and accepted without comment his brief announcement that he was going back to New York.

After he had gone, Jessup voiced the thoughts of the others when he whistled and remarked: "Well, I'll be damned! She *threw him down!*"

The battle Roger Bassett fought with himself was terrific and it was not successful. He tried to convince himself that it was, but to no avail.

He went over the ground, step by step, from the picture which Anne's words in the summer house had thrown on his mental screen—the scene that day at Wellston—to his retreat from Rockledge—to the present, when he sat in his private office, the office of Capewell & Hodges's new partner, and tried to sneer at women with what he told himself was fresh cause.

There was an ironic justice in the thing, he granted. But it had borne out everything he ever had felt, he argued. Another example of the calculated meanness which was the principal element in woman's make-up. Oh, hell! He'd been bitten and it served him right!

But there was the other side. The hours when he writhed in torture. When the sweet face of Anne rose before him and would not be thrust aside. When there was a glowing tenderness in her eyes and her voice was as soothing as the sigh of a summer wind.

When he could see her, a glorious thing across the tennis net, smashing the ball like

a man, all strength, youth and animation. When he could see her, reclining on the shimmerring floor of a pine grove, lifting her face to him and talking in that intimate manner he had grown to adore. When he felt the thrill that the touch of her hand had brought—

That was the other side—those hours when he knew—God help him—that he loved her! That he always would love her!

But he managed, outwardly. To his fellows, he was harder, more uncompromising than ever. He threw himself into his work with a prodigious energy; drove his subordinates ruthlessly; accomplished programs which would have taken another man double the time. Capewell & Hodges congratulated themselves on their new partner.

IX.

ANNE PARSONS was not herself at all that autumn. She went through her social activities hollowly and without enthusiasm. To her friends she maintained a brave front, but her mother's anxious eyes detected something amiss.

It was but natural that Anne should try to fool herself—to delude herself into the belief that she was glad she had revenged herself on Roger for his unpardonable behavior of that day so long ago. She had set herself to bring him to his knees that she might spurn him, that she might give him a taste of his own medicine. She ought to be content, she told herself. She had not counted on the terrific thing that had happened to her.

And now—well, she would have to go on. Thank Heaven, he would never know how it had been with her, how it was with her, how it would be with her—always!

Or, would it? Perhaps—she wondered if the pain that was gnawing at her heart, the ache that so often came into her throat, would go away, some time. She begged her mother to take her abroad.

X.

IT was in London—the occasion a dinner at the American Embassy—that Anne met

Tom Ellis, the matrimonial failure who had taken over the English branch of his father's business that he might forget. They were dinner partners and neither had ever heard of the other.

How the name of Roger Bassett crept into the conversation, Anne was never quite certain. When she heard it on Tom's lips, she forgot everything that had gone before; what led up to it did not matter. All she knew was that her body, yes, and her soul, grew suddenly tense. She tried to make her words casual, but she could not hear them as she said: "How strange! Why, I know Roger Bassett!"

"No!" Tom almost shouted in his delight. "Roger Bassett is the best friend I ever had! The best friend a man could ever have," he added, vehemently.

"Or a woman!" Anne ventured.

Tom looked at her with a sudden new interest, and answered: "It's amazing to hear a woman say that she knows Roger Bassett. He must have changed a lot since I saw him last."

"Why?" she cut in, trying desperately to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

"A lot of people have guessed and speculated about Roger," he told her. "They've wondered why he felt about women—wait a minute—I don't want to get myself into hot water. Did you ever hear that Roger was what is ordinarily called a woman hater?"

She nodded. "Go on," she said.

"Well, to my way of thinking, the thing was a tragedy. You see, I knew Roger when he was a kid. We lived side by side. And his people, his father and mother, didn't get on." Skillfully, Tom drew a picture of the home life of Roger Bassett, skillfully and with a feeling which could only be born of his affection for his friend.

Anne listened, and with Tom's words came understanding—an understanding that tortured her, tore at her heart. When he had finished she sat, very quiet, for so long that Tom wondered.

She said: "Will you do me a very great favor, Mr. Ellis?"

"Of course," he told her.

"Then—please drive me to a cable office."



The Point of the Needle

By JOSEPH GOLLOMB

THAT morning the students in Biology played a rather mean trick on their professor. In justice to the young men and women it must be said that Professor Harry Darwin Goldie, head of the department of Biology and Bio-chemistry, was not their real instructor but was substituting for Dr. Bransted, who seemed to be confined to his room with some sort of nervous breakdown.

Also the little professor on whom they played the trick did not know it was a trick and would not have called it mean even if he had recognized it. For all that happened was a pink-and-white miss got up and asked the little scientist a question about *myrmica rubra*, the tiny red-headed English biting ant.

The merest freshman in little fresh-water Meig's University knew that no matter how

uncomfortable Professor Goldie's quizzing might be, all one needed to do was to ask him a question on the little ants that were his hobby, passion, life-work and specialty—as the pink-and-white miss did that morning. At once the spectacled, fragile-framed little man with the dome of scholarly forehead launched a discourse on the social habits of tiny ants; the class itself swam out of his consciousness; and the students were free to whisper excited questions and comments on the first murder and mystery to be perpetrated under the serene elms of their university campus.

"It was Bill Snyder who discovered the body," some one whispered. "He was up all night with a sick boister in Engineering Hall and when he came up for air he saw something huddled by the wall in back of the library. It was just turning down—"

"Sam Simpson went to the anatomy room where the body was waiting for the coroner and pretended he had forgotten his notes there," somebody else murmured. "He says it's a fine young fellow of about twenty-five or so. Decently dressed. Might be a bookkeeper or salesman—"

"Salesman nothing!" hissed a lover of detective fiction. "Didn't they find a program in his pocket of the last Meig's City symphony concert—all Beethoven. Think salesmen go in for Beethoven? I tell you it's a person of culture and he was held up and murdered for his money. All his pockets were turned inside out. Not a thing found to identify him but that program. Highway robbery, that's all. Don't tell me!"

"Good heavens!" The pink-and-white miss shuddered delightedly. "None of us is safe on the campus after dark; not even when the moon is full and the night lovely. And if there isn't a single clew to the murdered or the murderer how is justice to be meted out? That's the word, isn't it. One *does* 'mete' out justice?"

"Yes," sibilantly sneered the champion cynic of the junior class. "One *does* mete out justice if you have any to mete. If we had some ham we could have some ham and eggs if we had the eggs. If there were any clews to be had Chief of Police Quigg would run down the murderer if Chief Quigg knew how to run down murderers!"

"What's the matter with *him* running the murderer down?" asked an enthusiastic young lady indicating with her boyish-bobbed head the little spectacled professor who was talking on and on and on about *myrmica rubra*, oblivious of the whispering.

"*Him!*" sniffed the cynic. "That little biographer of bugs? Why, if we rigged up a maypole at this moment and danced around it he wouldn't be any the wiser! And if—"

"Never you mind!" retorted another enthusiast. "He is the boy who can knock the 'ifs' out of your sniffs. Didn't he solve the Chase murder with only an eighth of an inch of hair and a pinch of dust? And didn't he draw the whole portrait of an unknown murderer in the Redfield affair just by looking at the bite in a cigar butt?"

"Sure he did!" several others whispered loyally.

"You mean his wife did!" the cynic retorted now on the defensive.

"Both of them did—he with science, she with common sense—and look who's here!" The whispering died instantly.

Dr. Raney, president of the university, had come in. He mounted the rostrum to the side of Professor Goldie and said in a low tone:

"Professor, you'd better dismiss the class. We need you in the anatomy room—that murder, you know."

Professor Goldie blinked as if he had been awakened from a pleasant dream. "What murder?" he asked aloud.

"Haven't you heard?" the president asked, glancing with disapproval at the intense interest the class now concentrated on the little professor as he uttered the question. "In any event you'll hear all about it in the anatomy room. We need you?"

"What can I do about it?" murmured Professor Goldie testily. "My subject is *myrmica rubra*, not murders. Besides I'm needed here. Dr. Bransted is ill with—some sort of nervous disorder or other. I would like to finish my remarks on *myrmica rubra*—"

But the president, who knew how to manage his faculty flock, with a motion of his head dismissed the whispering class and drawing his arm through that of the little professor led him across the campus to the Physical Science Building, in front of which was the unfamiliar spectacle of the red-painted automobile belonging to chief of Meig's City police department.

In the anatomy room on a wheeled table lay the body of a young man, clad in a poorly fitting but obviously new suit of blue serge with a thin line of red through it. He was smooth shaven and of medium build. His face, commonplace and without refinement, gave no clew to his type or possible occupation. It was one of those faces one meets in a steady, unnoticed stream in the streets, neither good nor bad, neither characterful nor weak.

In the room were Chief of Police Quigg, Bill Snyder, the superintendent of Meig's

University buildings, and Professor Goldie's wife, as usual calm, competent and with the look of one about to take charge of the meeting whatever the purpose.

"Sorry, Professor Goldie," apologetically smiled Chief Quigg, "but we've got to call on you for help again. Here is a man found murdered on your own campus. Killed with a blow of some blunt weapon on the head. We don't know who the victim is. All identifying papers and objects taken. Pockets turned inside out. Robbery apparently. The only clews are this program of the Meig's City symphony concert last Tuesday—and this—"

From the clenched and rigid fingers of the right hand of the victim protruded the edge of a shred of torn cloth.

"We had the ushers of the symphony concert up here to see if any of them recognize the man or the suit," went on the police official. "Nothing there. We searched the campus for clews. Nothing but trampled grass as of a struggle at the place the body was found. We sent out a still alarm for missing persons. No reply. So we have to fall back on you, the man who has helped us out so splendidly in the past."

Professor Goldie had been fidgeting with his glasses.

"I don't see why I should be taken from my work to attempt something for which I am not in the least fitted," he protested. "Just because I have been of some assistance to my wife in analyzing two previous murders is no reason why I should be considered an authority."

"Harry!" His wife assumed charge of the meeting now. "As things stand we know that one can walk out on the campus after dark with a fair possibility of being murdered. I, for one, shall risk no such thing until this murder is solved."

Professor Goldie's gently bristling crest began to droop as soon as his wife started to speak. It was partly habit, partly wisdom in following what he himself called "the better head in the family." In anything concerning the practical aspects of life he was as proud of her mind as she was of his in whatever had to do with the physical sciences.

"Then you will please remember I make no claims to my ability as a detective," he gave in grudgingly.

He stopped and with knowledge of how to handle *rigor mortis* he extracted from the clenched fist of the dead man the shred of white cloth it had clutched. Without even a glance at it he handed it to his wife.

"I'm very poor at such deductions," he said with injury still in his tone at being taken away from his beloved ants. "What would you say this piece of cloth is?"

She turned it over in her hand. "Part of the neckband of a soft shirt, the kind with collar attached. Torn off the assailant in the struggle, I should say. Yes, here is part of the manufacturer's label."

"Yes," nodded Chief Quigg. "I took a look at that label. I wish people wouldn't all wear the 'Fittem' shirts. They sell them in every store in the land almost and that makes them worthless as clews. And it's clear the murdered man for some reason—or it may have been the murderer who did it—has removed carefully all known means of tracing anything from his clothes. I've been all over them. But I'm hoping you'll have better—I was going to say luck, but I know it's more than that, professor. And Mrs. Goldie!" he added, quickly remembering her prominent share in past exploits of the kind.

"No, 'luck' would hardly be the word," grumbled Professor Goldie, picking up the shred of torn cloth and carefully spearing it with the point of a pin he always carried behind his lapel. "I would consider it luck to be freed of the necessity of investigating data outside of my province—"

Even as he grumbled he walked out of the room, carrying the bit of cloth still speared on its pin. His wife followed him, a glance from her telling the others to leave the little professor to her.

Across the campus he walked abstractedly, the bit of white cloth looking ridiculously like some tiny banner as it fluttered on its pin in his hand. Into the inclosed little sun porch of his cottage he went, where his laboratory was cluttered up with boxed-in ant-hills of *myrmica rubra*.

Resentment still lingering in the pocket

"Sara Simpson went to the anatomy room where the body was waiting for the coroner and pretended he had forgotten his notes there," somebody else murmured. "He says it's a fine young fellow of about twenty-five or so. Decently dressed. Might be a bookkeeper or salesman—"

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Resentment still lingering in the pucker

between his eyes, he placed the bit of cloth under the lens of his most powerful microscope. His wife sat down on a chair presumably to wait. But he knew she was really there to see that his attention did not sidle off from the murder mystery to *myrmica rubra*.

Soon he began to jot down notes of what the lens was telling him about the shred of neckband. He made so many notes but kept so silent that his wife possessed her soul with patience only at the expense of so much will power. But when he finally turned away from the microscope and sat down to puzzle something out she blew up, figuratively speaking.

"Harry!" she expostulated.

He started and realized that he had a wife in the room.

"Why, Alice, I am extremely puzzled," he said. "Here is a piece of cloth which the microscope shows is cotton. Yet adhering to it are unmistakably wool particles. What is more, they are particles of two different colors, blue and red. What is still more these particles are arranged in an orderly manner—a stretch of blue particles of wool, say, half an inch wide. Then a very narrow stretch of red wool particles running vertically through the blue, for say a twentieth of an inch. Then blue again for half an inch; then again a narrow stretch of red—"

"Well, wool rubs off on to other things, doesn't it?" Mrs. Goldie demanded.

He rubbed his chin perplexedly. "Yes, of course. They might very well be particles of wool thread rubbed off by friction on to the cotton. But they seem to rub off in such an orderly fashion. Whereas if one rubbed one texture against another with sufficient force to fray off particles like these there would be a mixed smear of them instead of this—this—"

"Pattern?" his wife suggested. "Pattern is what you wanted to say, Harry, isn't it?"

"Yes," he brightened. "It would look like a pattern—"

"Are these wool particles on the right side of the cloth or the wrong?"

"On the side meant to be seen, I believe."

"Of course!" She handed him a few colored pencils from a tumbler where he kept the drawing material he used in making diagrams of nervous tracts in tiny ants. "Just draw a diagram of how these wool particles are arranged, each in its own color, Harry."

He did so. She looked at the neat color pattern he sketched. Then her eyes glanced off into memory.

"I should say this might be the pattern which a blue suit with a red thread through it would leave on the collar of an over-shirt," she said ruminating. "Seems to me I saw such a suit somewhere—some time. *Oh, bother!*"

It was his turn to be curious. It was so seldom that his wife let him see her in such obvious defeat. "You seem to be disappointed, Alice," he ventured.

"I am. I remember now where I saw that suit. It was on your new assistant, Dr. Bransted. He wore that suit when he came here that first day from Harvard when you appointed him to help you. I remember that suit because I looked at it first thing he came into the house. I was curious to know why an instructor at Harvard should want to accept a place on the faculty of such a small college as ours. If it was a matter of money I could tell that by his clothes at once. But his suit was a nice one—a blue with a thin red thread. So I was—and am—just as much at sea about his coming here as ever. But I do remember that suit."

"And of course it does us no good knowing that this pattern you've drawn would correspond to a suit worn by Dr. Bransted. He doesn't look the kind to go parading on our campus in the dead of night murdering unknown men with blunt instruments. But you can never tell about these high-strung, silent men. I still don't know what brought him here from Harvard and what has sent him to bed with a nervous breakdown three weeks after he came here. I don't like it—"

"Alice, may I remind you that Dr. Bransted has been ill in bed for the last three days and that I have been taking charge of his classes. It isn't logical, therefore, to speculate on his being the murderer, is it?"

Of course it was not "logical." But as it was she who prided herself on being the logical one of the family she became illogically irritated that her husband should assume the rôle this time.

"It may not be logical but perfectly psychological for a sick man to get up out of bed and murder some one," she retorted. "At any rate I should be paying Dr. Bransted a visit this morning to see how he is getting along. Meanwhile, are you all through with that neckband?"

"N-no, there are some curious holes in it I want to examine further," he said uneasily, watching her making preparations for her visit to Dr. Bransted. "You don't intend agitating him with questions as to the murder, I hope, Alice?"

"Of course not. But it shouldn't agitate him for me to use my eyes!"

With that she adjusted her neat hat which perversely kept a touch of unacademic youth about it; perhaps an outcropping of the Alice who was voted the most popular girl in her junior year at college. But her husband, once she left their cottage and briskly cut across the campus, turned back to his microscope on the slide of which still lay the bit of torn neckband.

II.

BACHELOR Row was a line of neat semi-detached bungalows in which the unmarried members of the faculty kept individual house with the aid of charwomen who came daily to clean for them. The bungalow occupied by Dr. Bransted was the last of the row and a bit detached from the others. A physician with his satchel was leaving it just as Mrs. Goldie came up.

"Good morning, Dr. Corley," she said. "How is your patient this morning?"

"Not as satisfactory as I would like." The physician spoke as though it were a personal affront to him for a patient to be that way. "Temperature up, though it's largely due to excitement of some sort. Insists on reading newspapers and such stuff."

"And just what is his illness?" Mrs. Goldie asked firmly. She had been trying to find out for some days without much result.

"About the same as it was yesterday. A disturbed nervous condition due to some emotional disturbance."

"I see," she replied, but making it plain enough that she did not in the least see. "I suppose I may look in on him?"

"Yes, but keep his mind off anything likely to interest him too much. I know you can do it."

The catty speech meant nothing. Dr. Corley and Mrs. Goldie were old-time cronies and spats were their familiar talk.

A day nurse in white was trying to take a newspaper away from Dr. Bransted when Mrs. Goldie entered his room after knocking. He was a thin, high-strung type with large emotional eyes surprising in a scientist. Just then they were feverish.

"But the doctor said you were not to read!" the nurse protested.

"I absolve you and him from all responsibility for me!" the man in bed cried. "Please let me finish that paper!"

Mrs. Goldie took the paper from the nurse's hand and nodding a sort of short-hand message to her took her place by his side. The nurse left the room with relief.

"Good morning, Dr. Bransted," Mrs. Goldie began, sitting down. "You shouldn't be exciting yourself over a newspaper." She glanced at the front page. "And the Meig's City Bugle of all small town affairs! If you want to keep in touch with what is passing in the big world I'll have Miss Burrell bring you the New York and Chicago papers."

"But I don't want the New York and Chicago papers!" the sick man cried. "I want the Bugle. Please give it to me!"

She did not hesitate. "Why, certainly. I think myself there is more harm in keeping from a nervous man what he wants to know."

She handed him the Meig's City Bugle. With only a muttered "Thanks!" he at once became absorbed in the Bugle's account of how very mysterious and very sensational the murder on the university campus was.

For some moments she watched the come-and-go of blood in his face as he read. Then she rose.

"Do you mind my looking about a bit?" she asked. "Annie is likely to take ad-

vantage of a mere bachelor when she cleaned."

"Please do!" he murmured without looking up.

She gave the room a housewifely examination. Gradually and naturally she came to his clothes closet and opened it. Half a dozen suits hung carefully on their wooden "shoulders." She scrutinized their patterns carefully.

The blue suit with the red thread she had seen on Dr. Bransted when he first came from Harvard was nowhere in sight. But on the floor in a corner of the closet, under a traveling bag placed over it, seemed to be a shabby suit of gray.

Mrs. Goldie wondered at this uncharacteristic bit of untidiness. At this moment the patient's voice came sharply:

"What are you doing there?"

She turned. "I'm just seeing that the cleaning woman does not neglect her work," she answered steadily.

"Oh, I'm very sorry!" he apologized. "I didn't want you to—to—trouble about me!"

He looked so wrought up that she turned to leave.

"I hope to find you much improved tomorrow," she said. "Good morning!"

She was deeply abstracted as she recrossed the campus to her own cottage. Then on the threshold some recollection struck her with such dismay that the expression of it was evident even to her husband as she stepped on the sun porch.

"What have you found out, Alice?" he asked.

"Where Dr. Bransted's blue suit with the red stripe went to," she said with more uncertainty in her manner than he was accustomed to seeing. "It isn't in his clothes closet. *But it is on the body of the murdered man!*"

"Alice!" Professor Goldie exclaimed reproachfully at such sensationalism.

"Yes, it is! Because I stepped into the anatomy room and looked at the clothes on the body again. *Of course* I didn't observe the suit before. As soon as you told me of the pattern of wool particles you found on the neckband naturally I thought of any suit on earth but the one on

the dead man. But there it is on the murdered man!"

The little professor stared at his wife.

"Why, Alice, what are you implying?"

"There may be two such suits and Dr. Bransted may have a perfectly good explanation of why he threw away a perfectly good one. But it is curious that both murderer and murderer should wear suits of the same pattern. And it's still more curious that the suit on the murdered man should be two or three sizes too large for him—which would just about fit Dr. Bransted. Have you found out anything else from that neckband?"

He turned to his notes.

"Why, yes, in a way. I find a series of tiny holes in it, all edged with green. They are geometrically perfect and seem to have been made by some circular instrument of exceeding thinness. I would not have paid much attention to them except that they, too, are arranged—not exactly in a pattern but—Well, look at the arrangement yourself. I have indicated it by these dots in pencil on this paper. These dots stand in the same relation to each other as to position as the holes in the neckband. I can make nothing of their meaning, however."

Mrs. Goldie took a look at her husband's meticulous notation of the arrangement of the holes. She puzzled over them for a time then asked:

"Would a needle make such holes as you see under the lens?"

He brightened. "Why, yes, exactly!"

"And would green cotton thread rim these holes with particles if the thread had been drawn through them and had stayed in them for some time and been washed in the laundry?"

"Alice," he murmured with a blend of pride and humility, "your faculty for practical deductions is remarkable. Yes, green thread under the circumstances you describe would account excellently for what I see under the microscope."

"Then lend me your pencil."

Carefully she joined the penciled dots her husband had made. She did not make a mark until she had first tried it out in the air, so to say, and studied what such a line

would bring forth on paper. When she had linked up the last of the indicated needle holes the professor exclaimed:

"How ingenious of you, my dear!"

For the connected dots now showed a rather poorly drawn, but unmistakable series of letters and numbers:

UHL ASO 23.

"But what would it mean?" Professor Goldie asked after a silence.

"What one expects to find on the neck-band of a shirt that had been worn and washed—a laundry mark. Each laundry has its own individual mark and for every wash that comes in there is an individual mark, so that after the pieces have been washed the laundry knows which linen belongs together. 'UHL'—hm!" She pondered. Then she exclaimed: "UHL would stand for 'University Hand Laundry' which does the washing for most of the faculty—Harry, which would you rather do, go with me to the laundry or—what?"

He brightened. "Well, since you put the choice to me, Alice," he said eagerly, "I'd rather finish up tabulating my results in nitrogenous feeding of adult *myrmica rubra* which I am encouraged to believe—"

"Then I'll be back in time to see to your dinner!"

Before he could question her on her errand she was gone.

III.

MRS. GOLDIE hurried down the avenue to where Meig's City was becoming Meig's University with a corresponding huddle of shops and restaurants. Into the University Hand Laundry she went and holding out a slip of paper to the proprietor, asked:

"Would this be one of your laundry marks?"

"Yes," he replied after a glance.

"Then please look up whose mark it is."

He put the slip alongside of a big entry book. After some search in it he looked up.

"This is the mark we put on the laundry of Dr. Bransted of Bachelor Row," he answered. "May I ask what it's all about?"

"Thank you very much!" said Mrs. Goldie and hurried out of the place.

Her steps slackened as she approached Dr. Bransted's bungalow again. She had already telephoned his physician to meet her there and now waited till she saw him coming from the opposite direction.

"Dr. Corley, I want you to be waiting in the living room if I should need you," she said.

"What mischief are you up to, madam!" he bristled.

But she did not see fit to explain. Entering the bungalow she knocked on the sick man's door and entered as he called in a barely audible tone to do so.

A look from her sent the day nurse out of the room willingly. Then Mrs. Goldie turned gently to the man lying there with closed eyes and gaunt face.

"Dr. Bransted," she began softly. "I'm going to take an unwonted but I hope not an unwarranted liberty, because I am sure you will forgive me when I get through. May I?"

His eyes opened and he stared at her. Something he saw in her face made him sit up bolt upright. "What is it?" he cried hoarsely.

Her hand gently kept him from rising. "Nothing that need disturb you more than you already are—Dr. Bransted, I know that you had something—perhaps much—to do with that sad business of last night behind Engineering Hall—"

He almost leaped out of bed, restrained only by the fact that he would have to knock Mrs. Goldie over to do it.

"It's not true!" he whispered.

"I also know that you are incapable of doing anything that would not clear you, if you would only trust us enough. Won't you believe me when I say that?"

"So you did come to snoop this morning!" he snarled.

"Yes, because I felt I could help you. Won't you give me the chance?"

He flung himself on the pillow, face down. But not a sound escaped him through the violent storm that tore through the tormented heart. Finally he calmed down somewhat. Then he raised a haunted face and sat up.

"After all, what does it matter? One dies one way or another." He was speaking like

a man half in a dream. "Mrs. Goldie, I left Harvard to come here because of a woman there. She made my love for her the most terrible experience imaginable for me and for her, too. Jealousy on my part—disease, unbearable—unendurable for both of us. Finally she could bear it no longer. She engaged herself to another man. I realized after I began playing with the idea of killing the other man that I had better leave the scene. I came here. I might just as well have stayed there. She was with me, in my thoughts, in my dreams, in my very classes!"

"Then on Tuesday came the news that she had married the other man. All that afternoon I planned how to leave no trace of myself. I felt I could not live without her. I planned to put an end to myself in the gorge through which the railroad passes at Bank River. Then I wrote a note to your husband resigning my post, saying I had to leave at once for reasons of health—to travel—would write later, I said. I then removed from my clothes all identifying marks. From among my suits I chose the one I had worn least—once when I arrived here; again when I went to the Beethoven concert. When I should be found in the railroad cut I didn't want any one to be able to identify me.

"At about two in the morning I left my house and crossed the campus. I had just turned the corner of the Engineering Building when a man jumped out at me.

"Stick up your hands!" he cried."

Mrs. Goldie waited for him to go on. But he turned his face to the wall.

"Won't you tell me the rest?" she urged.

He shook his head. "It's scarcely worth while. I have only my word for what happened. I don't expect to be believed. And it isn't important that I should be believed."

"If we could find it possible to find the connection between you and that robber we'll find it possible to prove your story."

He remained silent for a while longer. "Well, it can't do any harm," he finally resumed. "Mrs. Goldie, I don't know if you ever thought of the theory that a man on his way to suicide will defend his life if

attacked. Yet the moment the man pointed his revolver at me I leaped at him.

"Either his weapon did not go off or he was caught off his guard. But we grappled and fought for each other's throats, each knowing it was to the death. He tore off the collar of my shirt. But I managed to break the revolver from his clutch and with it I struck him over the head.

"When I saw his body slump at my feet and felt his heart—I knew what I had done. Also I realized—that I no longer wanted to die. One so often learns to want a thing only when some one else tries to take it away. I was horrified. In my excited state of mind I was sure no one would believe my story. In the man's pockets were many things that might identify him. In mine, nothing, as I thought. I wanted now to hide my connection with this—matter. I dragged the body into the deep shadow and changed clothes. He had on my suit now, I, his. Then I left him lying there, while I stole home and throwing his suit into the closet there, I got into bed. That's all there is to my story."

Mrs. Goldie strode to the closet and picked up the crumpled gray suit as Dr. Corley hustled into the room.

"I've stood enough of this!" he cried, hurrying over to the patient. "Interfering with my patients this way!"

Mrs. Goldie paused on the threshold, the suit tucked under her arm.

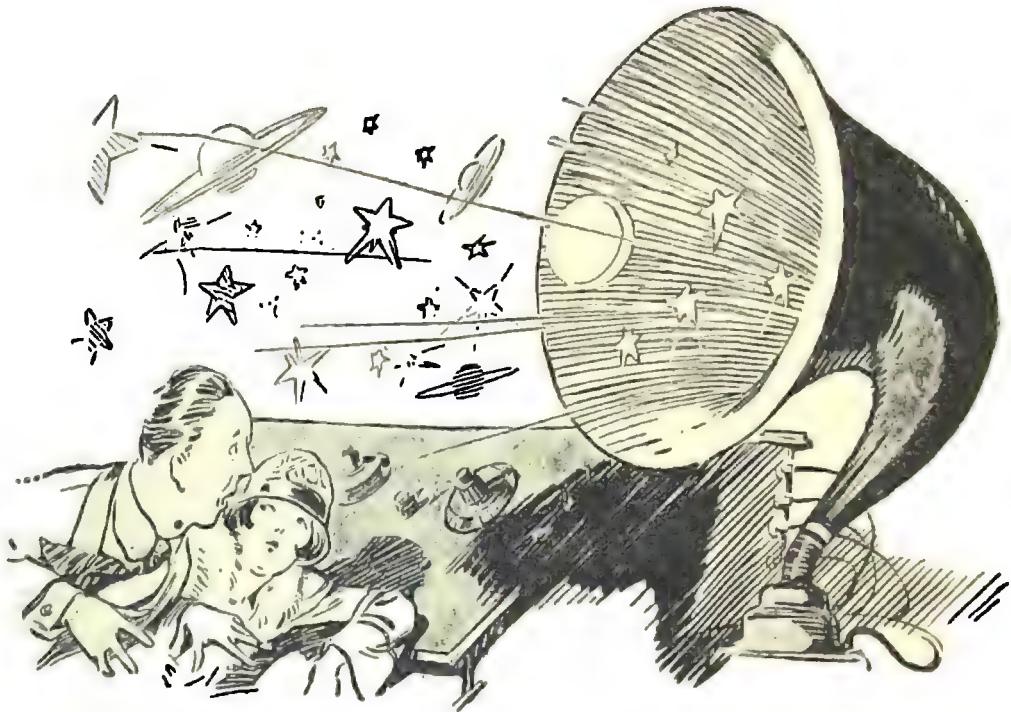
"I'll give you one hour, Dr. Corley, to get him on his feet," she smiled. "Then I'll give him my treatment—over the telephone!"

Dr. Corley snorted with angry contempt.

But an hour later he communicated to his patient a message that had just come over the wire.

"It's Darby Colkins, alias 'Sticker' Pete, with a record as a hold-up man. Body and clothes now identified. Coroner finds death due to blow dealt by reputable citizen in the course of self-defense against robbery and possible murder—"

Then seeing the effect of the message on his patient, Dr. Corley muttered, "Drat that woman! Now I suppose she will want to take charge of *all* my cases!"



Radio Razz

By JACK WOODFORD

I HAVE always liked to hang around old Doc Edwards's radio store in the evenings; not, particularly, because of any great interest in radio, for I have a five tube set of my own with which I can pick up everything from Kahoolawe to Nansen Sound and I could just as well stay at home and try for the Eiffel Tower; but it's the way old Doc Edwards sells 'em that gets me.

You see, the "Doctor" comes from Edwards's days as a veterinary surgeon; but old man Edwards was never at heart a veterinary surgeon, he was in reality a horse trader. When horses got to the point where people began to consider saving the last remaining specimens for zoological gardens and historical societies, Doc Edwards turned to radio. And oh, what a radio salesman he is!

To begin with, he won't have a new set in his store, or, if he does have to stock a few new sets now and then, he invariably

marks them "secondhand," for he hates anything that has a fixed price on it.

Not a set in Doc's shop has a price tag, and not a set but what he may vary the price from one hundred to one thousand per cent. And I wish you could see him sell them. All he aims to do is to get *some* cash out of any one who comes in the store, and, leave it to him, he never fails; at least, I never saw him fail except once, the night he had matchmaking in his head.

You see, Doc is a kindly old cuss, and it isn't so much that he wants to make a whale of a lot of money as that he just naturally enjoys a shrewd bargain. After he's made one he's as happy as a lark, whether any more customers come in or not; but, if he makes a bad bargain, the best thing to do is to go home, for Doc won't be worth talking to for the rest of the evening.

One of Doc's pet theories is that if you use a real good super-hetrodyne set, on a

clear, calm night, sitting in a dark room with all light excluded, there is a way of tuning that permits you to see the whole solar firmament in the mouth of your loud speaker. I've always thought that that was a lot of bunk, but—well, we'll see.

One night I dropped into Doc's store around eight thirty to watch him make a few "trades," as he invariably called his sales.

He was looking kind of glum, and I surmised that he must have turned a pretty bad bargain somewhere along in the afternoon, and wouldn't be worth while talking to that evening, and I was just about getting ready to go home again when in came the prettiest girl I ever laid eyes on.

She was about twenty or thereabouts, and dressed up to the minute.

"Want to look at a five tube set, neutrodyne circuit," she said to Doc.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Doc, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. He loved to bargain with women because they were so much shrewder than the men usually. "I got some of the finest five tube neutrodynes in the city, madam; of course, they're all secondhanded, but, most of 'em is as good as new, and I guarantee every set to work; if it don't you're at liberty to bring it back and have it fixed free of charge, or get another one, just as you like. Anyone who has done business with me will tell you that Doc Edwards is strictly on the square."

"Yes," agreed the young woman, looking at me curiously out of the corner of her eye, "several people I know in the neighborhood have spoken very well of you to me; I have every confidence in you." She lowered her head for a moment after this remark, and Doc shot a glance at me in high glee, a glance which said "Watch me!"

I, however, was busy watching the girl. I must admit that it had been a long time since I had seen a pretty woman who interested me so much. She was the kind that even I, confirmed bachelor that I am, would have considered furnishing up a flat for and being led off, bound willingly hand and foot, to the altar.

"Now here is a set," began Doc, leading

her over to inspect a real secondhand outfit, in fairly good condition, though a little old. "You can pick up the whole United States with this, and possibly some points in Europe. I'll guarantee it absolutely, and if you can't get the Coast after you've had it thirty days you may bring it back to me and I'll return your money."

The girl looked interested.

"How much?" she inquired, glancing over at me in a confidential sort of way as much as to say, "You won't let him take advantage of me, will you?"

I smiled back reassuringly, and thought I detected just the faintest answering smile.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Doc. "I like you somehow, you're the kind of person who will boost my business in the neighborhood, so I'll just let you have this set for a hundred and nine dollars and fifty cents, which, you can see, is dirt cheap."

The girl looked a little surprised.

"Why," she stammered, in patent confusion, "I couldn't think of paying that much for a set; fifty dollars would be my limit."

Doc looked pained and took out a corn cob pipe and lit it before replying.

"Well," he said, at last, "I'd be losing quite a bit if I let you have it that cheap; but, as I said before, once in a while I make an 'advertising sale,' that is, I let some one have a set real cheap because I think he's the sort of person who will boost my business in the neighborhood. Now, if you'll promise not to tell any one how much you paid for this set I'll split the difference between your price and mine with you, making the total cost of this excellent set, to you, and to you only, seventy-nine dollars and seventy-five cents; and, at that price, you're getting a set below cost."

Still the girl looked a little doubtful. She glanced over at me, and I was sure I detected the faintest suggestion of a companionable smile this time.

"Well," she hesitated, "may I try it out for a few moments?"

"Certainly," said Doc, for this tickled him; he considered a customer seventy-five per cent. sold if he could get them to tuning a set themselves.

He took the set over on the counter and hooked it up with the immense aerial he maintained on the roof, and with his fixed ground. Just as the girl started turning on the lights the door opened again and a young man came in with a large bundle under his arm.

Silently he placed the bundle upon the counter and started unwrapping it. When he had finished there stood, exposed to view, one of the finest little three tube "unnamed circuit" sets I ever saw. It looked as though it was brand new; one of the sort of sets that was dear to Doc's heart, for he often told me that it was much easier to sell a poor set that was shiny than a good set with the varnish worn off.

"Want to sell you this set," said the young man airily.

He was that sort of youngster whom clothing manufacturers often use to drape their wares on in advertising matter. Tall, straight, black shiny hair as revealed when he suddenly jerked his hat off on observing the presence of a lady in the place, and clear cut, well chiseled features.

Doc looked at him and then looked over to where the girl, oblivious to everything was turning the dials on the five tube neutrodyne back and forth.

"Well," said Doc grudgingly, addressing the young man, "I can't give you very much for this set; you see, it's an unnamed circuit and—"

"And that's the best part of it," interrupted the young man, "right now every one is buying the 'unnamed circuit,' and you know it. However, if that's the way you feel about it—" He started calmly to wrap up the set again.

"Well, wait," interrupted Doc, "I didn't say how much I'd give you yet, did I? Never go away without getting the other man's figures first. How much do you want for it?"

"How much will you give me?" snapped the young man.

"You're selling the set," Doc reminded him.

"Will you give me sixty-five dollars?"

Doc looked pained.

"There's a law in this city," he said, "against highway robbery; surely you

don't want to take advantage of a man of my years? Somebody's gone and told you about my soft heart. It's cost me many a dollar I'll tell you!"

Wordlessly the young man started again to wrap up the set.

"Wait, wait," said Doc, hastily. "I'll give you fifty dollars for it."

"Nothing stirring!" snapped the young man. "I will come down a little though; I'll let you have it for fifty-five."

Doc looked very sad, and I, full knowing that the argument might last half an hour, summoned up all my courage and walked over to the young lady, who had thus far been unsuccessful in securing an out of town station.

"May I help you?" I said, with my heart beating like a trip-hammer in my breast, frightened to death for fear she might answer frigidly "Sir!" But she did no such thing.

"Why, that's very kind of you," she said graciously, turning a smile upon me that made me feel quite certain that I could pick up Piccadilly for her without any trouble. To cover my confusion I turned to the knobs and started frantically to turn them.

Sure enough, very shortly, came the words "Cocoanut Grove," and then a crash of sounds, but I knew I was close to a California station and I began to feel a little of the excitement which comes when you're very near a station like that.

To give himself a chance to think things over, and also for the psychological effect upon the young man, Doc walked over to where we stood tuning and took me aside. By this time I had the station almost in line and I turned the set over to the girl to finish the job, which she started to do with much interest.

"Listen," said Doc to me in an impish whisper. "What do you think of those two? Prettiest girl in the neighborhood and finest looking young man around here. If I could bring them together I'd give the girl that five tube set for a wedding present; it would make a peach of an advertisement for the store, eh, what?"

"Suppose," I suggested coldly, and with some heat, "that you just attend to your own business, which is cheating helpless

young people who come in here to buy and sell radio sets."

Doc looked pained for a moment, then he burst out laughing and slapped me on the back.

"So that's the way it is!" he roared. Then, in an aside: "All right, you know I take the address and phone number of every customer; there may be a chance for you; hope to goodness there is. She is the kind that would keep a man from loafing around radio stores at night and casting aspersions on the proprietors."

With that he was gone, back over to where the young man stood frowning at the set he seemingly hated to part with at the price offered. I went back to the girl's side, a little bolder now after the effect of my first effort.

"Perhaps we can get Frisco, too," I suggested. "Here, I'll show you how to go about it."

With that I took one of her dainty little white hands—it felt as soft and cool as the petal of a rose—and placed it upon the dial. Putting my arm around behind her back I took her other hand and placed it upon the potentiometer.

She colored and laughed prettily, and I colored and trembled frightfully, but, sure enough, after a moment we began to hear squawks which sounded like Frisco. Hurriedly I threw the dials out of adjustment; I had no intention of picking up Frisco so promptly. I wanted it to be a long-drawn out process.

Presently I heard Doc making the concluding remarks with which he always wound up a sale or a purchase, and suddenly, at this juncture the girl, apparently forgetting me, spoke up.

"Well, Dr. Edwards," she said, "I like this set, but I won't pay you one cent over fifty dollars for it." There was an air of very definite finality about her remark, and Doc did one of those surprising things which make it interesting to watch him.

"Sold," he said, without further quibbling.

I happened to have been in the store the day he bought the set the girl was taking, and I knew that he had paid forty-five dollars for it, so I didn't say anything, as I certainly should have done if he had charged her too much for it.

"Will you wrap the set up for her?" asked Doc.

"Certainly," I agreed quickly, "and carry it home for her too if she'll let me."

She blushed and smiled prettily, but answered nothing. Silence is ample consent, I said to myself. As I finished wrapping the thing up and put it under my arm Doc was counting out fifty-five dollars to the young man.

A strange thing happened then. The young man picked up a five dollar bill and put it in his bill fold; the rest of the money he shoved back at Doc Edwards.

"Why!" breathed Doc. "What's—what's the idea?"

"It's yours," retorted the young man angrily.

"Mine?"

"Sure," snapped the young man. "That lady is my wife; I'm paying for her set. I suppose if we came in here to exchange a three tube for a five tube set you'd have soaked us about twenty-five dollars to boot. We heard all about you, you old horse thief, before we came over here; so, for once, you can consider that you had something put over on you."

I stood there with my mouth gaping as the young man walked over, snatched the bundle out from under my arm—and then suddenly another strange thing happened. I dreamed that I was looking into an immense loud speaker and that I could see all the stars in the heavenly firmament at once, and some of them were jumping around playing leap-frog; acting, in fact, so as almost to bear out Doc's theory which I had so often scoffed at.

THE END



FRED MACISAAC'S

NEXT NEW SERIAL WILL START SOON. WATCH FOR IT.

10 A

Outside The Law

By Barclay Northcote

This is the first installment of a seven-part true story describing the exploits of Pat Crowe. Crowe was the bandit who kidnapped the Cudahy boy and held him for ransom. He was a train robber, a diamond thief, a hold-up man, and general all-round bandit. For eighteen years he has been going straight.

All the material in this series was secured direct from Crowe and has been verified by police and court records. The first time that the full story of the life of this bandit has ever been told. Don't miss this first story which is in June 27th issue.

FLYNN'S A DETECTIVE WEEKLY

In June 27th also will begin a new serial, "THE ART VANDAL," by Owen Fox Jerome. This is the nom de plume of a well-known writer who wishes his identity to remain secret. THE ART VANDAL is a modern Raffles who steals nothing but art treasures, and from people who can afford to lose them.

Joseph Gollomb is getting into the swing of his New York police material. In this issue he tells of the daring and unbelievable exploits of Jacob Hays, who was in his own person the entire police force of New York City, 150 years ago.

Don't forget that this issue also contains another installment of SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS. This is the biggest hit of the detective world. More interesting than cross word puzzles, and more stimulating to the mind. June 27th issue now on sale.

The leading feature in July 4th issue is Great Getaways from Sing Sing

By James Jackson

James Jackson is the former city detective of New York. We published the story of his life as written by himself last winter. A reader of that series who had himself been a prisoner under Jackson questioned some of the statements. The result was the present article, which not only proves Detective Jackson's previous statements, but adds a bale of interesting stories about the men who escape from Sing Sing and what happens to them.

Also in July 4th we introduce a new author to FLYNN readers: Roland Johnson, who brings with him a new character, the automobile bandit. This man rivals Dick Turpin as a highwayman, and knows more about motors than the men who make them.

Inspector Hopper returns to us in a new novelette, "STARTING WITH RUST." It isn't fair to give it away, so we will only say that the story hangs upon the condition of a tool supposed to have been used in a burglary.

July 4th issue on sale July 2nd at all news-stands.

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